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SHE PINNED A CARNATION ON HIS COAT.

Frontispiece. Page 12.

The Girl Question

FOUNDED ON THE PLAY OF WILL M. HOUGH AND
FRANK R. ADAMS

BY

JOHN W. HARDING

Author of "The Time, The Place and the Girl," "Paid in
Full," "The Chorus Lady," Etc.

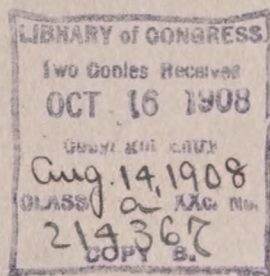
*"Any guy ought to cop out a Love, Honor and Obey as
soon as he raises the price."* —WISDOM OF CON.



Illustrations by
GORDON GRANT

G. W. DILLINGHAM COMPANY
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

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THE GIRL QUESTION

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The Girl Question

CHAPTER I

It was busy Chicago's busy lunch hour, and in the Golden Palace restaurant the clatter of knives and forks and crockery mingled with the hum of conversation like the continuous firing of a Gatling gun. Situated in La Salle Street, the Golden Palace was frequented chiefly by business men and clerks who had little time or inclination to dally with the delicacies which constituted a standing libel on the high-sounding names with which they were designated on the menu. After the manner of business men in the middle of the day in all American cities they bolted their food with reckless disregard

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of the consequences to their digestive apparatus, but each and all found time to linger over the settling of his check at the cashier's desk. For behind the desk sat Elsie Davis, and when it is explained that she was reputed to be one of the handsomest women in the city; that she was vivacious in the extreme, and that it was her custom to lean forward and pin a carnation on the coat of every male patron as he handed over the money in settlement of his bill, the secret of the restaurant's popularity will be apparent to everybody, and none will be the least bit surprised by the additional statement that in the process of being decorated with the flower in the full sunlight of Miss Davis' smile, many a flattered diner neglected or gallantly "forgot" to gather up the change which she placed upon the desk.

Elsie Davis was tall, blonde, rosy complexioned, with big violet eyes and white even teeth.

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Even the jealous waitresses, themselves by no means deficient in personal charms, conceded that she was a "swell looker," as they phrased it, and it is hardly to be wondered at that Cornelius Ryan, better and more appropriately known as "Con" Ryan, who managed the restaurant for the company owning the place, should have lost his heart—and also his head—to her, so that she reigned the undisputed sovereign of the Palace. Con, by virtue of his position as manager, and of his good looks and sunny disposition, basked in the cashier's favor and passed his days seesawing between the roseate heights of hope and bliss and the dark depths of hopelessness and despair; for with all his aplomb and "blarney" in conducting the business confided to him, he became as timid as a mouse, and his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, whenever he sought to make known his passion to the object of it.

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Engaged in conversation with his stunning cashier he paid no attention to the customers who streamed in, most of them greeting her with a smile and raising their hats as they passed, for she was in most encouraging mood, and the bustle and excitement of the moment with the continual interruptions had emboldened him to venture from casual remarks to the subject which engrossed his mind and senses, and which in quietness and alone with her he would have been incapable of broaching.

"Say," he blurted, getting the declaration in edgeways between the departure from the desk of one customer and the arrival of another. "I got something to tell you. Maybe you'll be glad to hear it."

"Is it a secret?" she demanded sweetly.

"It is to everybody but you."

She affected surprise.

"Why to everybody but me?"

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"Aw, I don't know," he explained bashfully, "except that I want it to sound better to you and me than to anybody else."

"Is it another funny story?"

"You got past my guard all right that time. Naw, it ain't funny; that's why it makes me so groggy when I try to tell it to you. I'm all to the gravy when it comes to the kiddin' game, but any time I try to get down to cases, on the dead, I'm an awful frost. What I want to say is—why—er—"

"Whisper it in my ear," she smiled, leaning forward encouragingly.

"Naw," he protested, "it ain't nothin' except that His Nobs told me he was goin' to give me an interest in the business here the first of the year."

"Oh, won't that be dandy!" exclaimed the girl enthusiastically. "You don't know how glad I am."

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Con flushed crimson with embarrassment as he stammered:

"I—I'm glad that you're glad. Kind of think I'll fix the place up a little. I was speilin' with a contractor yesterday and he says I can fix the place up great with a Flemish oak ceilin', or something like that, for three thousand dollars, if I steal the lumber."

"What's this extra twenty-five cents for?" interrupted a man who evidently was displeased.

"What did you have?" she inquired, taking his check.

"Eggs—"

"That's for storage," she cut in before he could get any further, and she flashed at him an entrancing smile that disclosed her glistening teeth as she pinned a carnation on his coat. The man raised no further question

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about the amount of his bill and went his way with a gratified smirk.

"You must use up about a million carnations a week this way," commented Con. "You give 'em to every man."

"Yes, but it pays," she replied. "The men I like best I give white ones to—that is, to the unmarried men."

"How can you tell whether or not they're married?"

"Well, I pin a carnation on a man's coat. If he comes back the next day still wearing it he's unmarried. But about the decorations you are going to have done. Can I help design them?"

"Say, you can do a whole lot more than that if you want to."

"Do you mean picking out some new tables or selecting the waitresses?"

"Naw, nothin' like that," he said becoming

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terribly bashful again. "Say, I ain't there when it comes to the straight talk. Every time I try to cut out the small town comedy I get paralysis of the bell clapper and it crabs the whole act. Maybe if I went out and hoisted in the tall boys till I was sprung, I might be able to hand it to you straight. Say, when I get that interest in the biz, I'll be makin' enough to get married."

"What about it?"

"Aw, nothin'," he said, more embarrassed than ever by this leading question. "Guess I ought to be able to salt quite a wad in my kick if business keeps up and maybe—"

"Maybe what?"

"Aw, nothin'. I think any guy ought to cop out a Love, Honor and Obey, as soon as he raises the price. I guess I almost got my mit on my bundle, so that's why I thought I'd come and—and—"

"And what?"

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"Aw, nothin'. Gee! I'm a crippled goat in this game, so I guess I better ditch it for a while before I throw up the sponge. Anyhow I'm glad I ain't got to buck up against the cold outside like most young guys when they start in workin'."

Perspiration on his brow indicated the effort this attempted excursion into the land of the tender where he had ventured to the verge of a declaration of marriage had cost him. All his suddenly acquired courage had fizzled out completely and the diversion caused by a call to duty filled him with an immense relief.

"Mr. Ryan, there's an old guy cutting up and beefing about everything. He's hollering for the head waiter."

The speaker, a waitress, petite and brunette, with a tilt to her nose just sufficient to give her keen, intelligent physiognomy an added touch of piquancy, spoke in no amiable tone as she

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glanced sullenly from Con to the cashier. She indicated an elderly man upon whom the eyes of all the diners were concentrated. He was a somewhat portly individual with short cropped side whiskers and an air of conscious importance.

"Gee! that's Sears!" exclaimed the manager, hurrying over to him.

"Put me wise," requested the waitress hastily to the cashier. "Who is Sears?"

"What, Jo, never heard of T. P. Q. Sears?" replied Miss Davis, astonished. "Well, he only owns several railroads and has got La Salle Street and about forty theatres in his pocket, that's all. He's just married for the second time."

"Married one of the four hundred, I suppose?"

"Yes—one of the two ciphers. She was his stenographer. His first wife was a society lady

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and she was out so much that he only met her once a week. This time he married his stenographer so as not to take any chances. I expect him to help me after I get to be an actress."

"Are you going to be an actress?"

"Yes, I want to get on the stage the worst way."

"The worst way? Then join the chorus," came the recommendation with a laugh and "Jo," otherwise Josephine Sargent, tripped away to wait upon the magnate as she estimated in her mind the probable figure of her prospective tip.

CHAPTER II

“What kind of management do you have in this place, anyhow?” growled the great Mr. Sears as Con appeared before him. “In the first place, the waitress supposed to be attending to this table doesn’t pay any attention to me.”

“Did you try her on baseball?” inquired the manager with his genial smile. “She’ll warm up after a while. Try sendin’ her flowers and see how she falls for it. You got to know how to handle ’em—but don’t weaken. All the shirt-waists here are favorites, and if you pull any sand paper work on ’em, you’re liable to land with your map in the sawdust. Oh—I forgot to ask,” he added, seeing that his effort at facetiousness had served only to incense the man

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still further. "Is there anything wrong with the food?"

"What do you think I called you in here for?" roared Sears, glaring at him.

"I thought maybe you was going to tip me to somethin' soft that was going to be pulled off at the track this afternoon," replied Con suavely.

"Look at this dinner—would you eat it?"

"No, but maybe I'm prejudiced. I don't eat here."

"Look at that chicken. I suppose you think it's all right?"

"Yeh," said Con dubiously, rubbing his chin, "that's Tommy. He's all right. I've known him for years."

"And this soup. Can you explain why you serve such funny colored stuff?"

"Well, Mr. Sears, sir, we've got a funny colored cook."

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"That'll be about all of that," commanded the great man, pounding the table with his fist. "I'm a business man, not a pin-head, ten-dollar-a-week clerk, and my time is worth money. Understand what I mean?"

Then glaring at the waitress he added:

"I told you I wanted mushrooms with this steak. Why isn't there any?"

"There ain't any working here," replied the girl coolly.

"And as to the steak, I couldn't make any impression on it."

"Try one of the waitresses," suggested Con with his disarming smile. "What else did you order?"

"Why, that chicken. Did you ever see anything like it?"

The manager was becoming embarrassed.

"We've got a dog that likes it," he stam-

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mered. "Say, I heard a funny story the other day. It was about—"

"Listen to me," interrupted Sears, "understand what I mean? Would you say that chicken was ready to eat?"

"I don't know, he had a late breakfast. Gee!" he exclaimed as the diner turned it over showing the other side burned to a cinder, "There's been a fire here. Jo, tell Billy I want to see him at once."

In a moment a big coal black negro in a cook's hat and apron shuffled up.

"No, sah—mah goodness, Mistah Ryan," he began in an effort to stall off trouble, "ah nevah see sech a stove—no sah—no time."

"Where did you get that chicken?" demanded Con indicating the blackened mass.

"Ah doan know fuh suah, but ah reckon ah got him in the back of de neck. Kain't you see no mark on him?"

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"Is the fire still goin'?"

"No, sah—it's done gone. Mah goodness, ah nevah see sech a stove, no time. Lemme 'splain all 'bout dat chicken. Mah goodness, ah nevah see sech a chicken—yo' see ah was chasin' 'at chicken 'ith one han' an' tendin' 'at ole stove 'ith the othah—wasn't doin' no reg'lah cookin', Mistah Ryan, no sah—jes' kind o' practicin', but it won't nevah happen no mo'—no sah, no time. Dey dog-gone stove was suttin'ly actin' up mos' scrumptious dis mawnin'. Mah goodness, ah nevah see sech a stove. But ah suah can fix dat chicken, jest lemme scrape him off where he's burnt an' he's jest as good as new. Yo, know, Mistah Ryan, 'at when it comes to cookin' ah suah can handle anything, but yo' see dis mawnin' dat dog-gone stove—"

Con interrupted him curtly.

"Cut out all the trapeze work, Billy," he

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ordered "and get down to cases, because if you ever let any chicken like that vamp out of the kitchen I'll come and bounce a rolling pin on your lid until there won't be no chance for the bones to knit. This place is goin' to be a reg'lar café. You ain't cookin' for no three-dollar oatmeal joint, where the teamsters do their sword-swallowing. I rescued you from a deep sea-going lunch wagon, and if you don't cut out the colored weekly jokes there'll be fireworks all over the place, and you'll be found left in the vermicelli. Do you get me?"

"Well, lemme 'splain, mah goodness, ah nevah see sech a stove, no time."

But the manager wanted no further explanation. He hustled the ebony deity of the kitchen unceremoniously back to the regions from which he had emerged.

Jo in the meantime made an unsuc-

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cessful attempt to placate the irate customer.

"What would you like to have the orchestra play?" she demanded.

"Have 'em play dead," he growled, but he kept his gaze upon her as he tapped the table nervously in his impatience.

The manager, also anxious to satisfy such a distinguished patron, returned quickly.

"Now, can't we frame up something nice for you instead of that chicken?" he said. "You know we don't want to lose your business. Try our home made mince pie."

"I did—it's not guilty."

"Then let me hand you our forty-cent table d'hote with a bottle of writing fluid thrown in. Remember, it's all on the house. Then you can vamp over to the cigar counter and pick out the swellest hay-fever torch in the place."

"Is this venison steak from a real deer?"

"Yes—a long ways from it," put in Jo.

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"Bring it quick, then—also a rum omelette. Understand what I mean?"

While the girl hurried to give the order Con tried to keep the capitalist's attention occupied.

"I'm goin' to have an interest in this place after New Year's," he confided. "I guess I ought to connect with an awful bundle of samo-leons if this business keeps up."

"You won't unless you fire most of your waitresses," Sears told him. "They don't know their business."

"Say, they ain't supposed to know nothin' about waitin' on a table. They win on their looks, take it from me. Why, a swell lookin' dame like that could feed Paris green to those guys an' they'd think it was lobster à la Newburg. Can you imagine an Indian waltzing up to a Queen of Sheba like that an' tellin' her to slip him a ham on rye? Nix on your tin-type. When she turns her lamps on him he

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gets groggy an' loses his voice, an' when he comes to he's booked for a two dollar porter-house. There's nothin' to it."

The conversation was interrupted by a young man who rose from a neighboring table and approached Sears.

"I'm a reporter for the *Gazaboo*," he announced confidentially. "I want to ask you about this new theatrical combine you are supposed to be making."

"You do!" retorted the magnate with a frown. "Well, when I've got anything to tell the newspapers about my affairs, I'll send for you. Understand what I mean?"

"Yes, but I was told that you were trying to get control of the Grand Central railway system, and I wanted—"

"That will do. I'm hungry and I want food, not talk. When I feel the need of conversation I take lunch with my wife."

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At this juncture Jo returned with the order and pushed the enterprising scribe away.

"Go sit down and be a good boy, Mac," she said. "You'll live longer."

"I wanted a rum omelette," commented Sears, turning over suspiciously the yellow concoction on his plate.

"That's the rummest omelette we can make," retorted the girl.

"Ask that colored cook to step here a minute."

"Ain't you went yet, suh?" demanded that worthy with a grin as he shuffled up to him. "Ah'm suttinly pleased to meet yo' agin, suh."

"Mr. Sears wants to know what's the matter with his eggs," said Jo.

"Ain't nuffin' the matter 'ith them aigs. Ah'm pussonly 'cquainted 'ith 'em—knowed 'em foh a long time—mos' a month."

"But this is only cooked on one side. It hasn't been turned over."

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"Ah sho'ly am sorry, Mistah, 'bout 'em aigs. Ah jes' can't train so'se 'ey'll turn over. Nevah had but one aig 'at could do it. 'At aig could turn handsprings, suh—an' Ah sho' hated to part wif it. You see, suh, Ah can't rightly do nuffin' wif 'at stove out theah. Mah goodness, Ah nevah see sech a stove."

Jo trod on his foot as a hint to go, and the cook, still grinning, ambled off.

"What's the matter, won't the stove work?" inquired Sears.

"No," answered Jo, "and what's worse the cook won't work either."

The man considered her attentively.

"You're brighter than some of these girls," he said at last. "Have you been a waitress all your life?"

"Not yet."

"Do you earn a good deal here?"

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"I earn about twice what I get. Can I do anything more for you?"

"No, but maybe the doctors can. Say, by the way, I need a stenographer."

"I thought you married one?"

"That's why I need another. Do you know anything about typewriting?"

"Not much, but I can learn."

"You can learn anything if you buckle down and work hard."

"Yeh—that's the only way—at least for me. I never got anything yet that I didn't fight for, and I suppose I'll always have to fight for anything I get."

"You're right; and anything you can get belongs to you by right of conquest. That's my principle. I fought for all I've got—dollar by dollar. I had to take it away from other people—yes—but if they had been fit to handle their own money I wouldn't have gotten it.

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Money is power. I wanted power, so I got together all the money I could. Ask any man in this great American country to-day what his aim in life is, and he'll tell you it's getting together enough money so that he'll be more powerful than his neighbors. Men were knighted in the sixteenth century because they crushed their adversaries. We get money—power—to-day, by doing the same thing. Understand what I mean?"

"Do you think it would be a good thing for this country if the poor people thought the way you do?"

"Humph! If they thought the way I do they wouldn't be poor people. That's all—bring me my check. If you need a job come around to my office."

"Thanks," said the girl. "Maybe I'll be glad to, one of these days."



CHAPTER III.

As Jo departed to fetch the bill, four young fellows, whose manner and attire proclaimed them loudly as college men, sauntered in. The best looking and the best dressed individual of the party surveyed the restaurant with leisurely interest. He was evidently the leader to whom the other members of the quartette toadied, for they waited upon his pleasure and laughed when he laughed.

"Same old place!" he commented. "Just the way it used to look—only they've got a better looking lot of girls. Say, fellows, pipe the cashier. I don't know who she is but I'll play her straight across the board. It's worth coming all the way home from Europe to see her."

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As the party advanced the newspaper man whom Jo had addressed as Mac jumped to his feet and greeted with great cordiality the man who had spoken.

"Harold Sears! For the love of Mike!" he exclaimed. "Where did you blow from? Haven't seen you since you left college."

Young Sears grasped the outstretched hand with a warmth that showed his pleasure at meeting his friend again.

"Still working on the paper, Mac?" he said. "Just got back from Europe. Haven't even been home to see the old man yet. Got to get into him for a thousand to-day."

They were beside the table of the elder Sears whose back was towards them, and the reporter by frowns and pantomime endeavored to warn the son of the father's proximity, but it was too late. The latter had heard the remark and turned abruptly.

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"You've got a damn fine chance to do it! Understand what I mean?" he rasped.

"Why, hello, father," said his son and heir not in the least perturbed as he advanced and seized his sire's hand. "Just struck town. Ain't you glad to see me?"

"Yes—especially after what you just said about the thousand," responded the magnate, looking him over with secret satisfaction and pleasure.

"Well, do I get it?"

"Maybe, if you go out with a piece of lead pipe. Your college training ought to come in handy. Sit down."

"Don't talk like that, dad," coaxed Harold. "We haven't seen each other for a year. Let's be friends. You know, I've never felt that you were very close to me."

"I should say not—twenty thousand a year isn't close."

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"Dad, I'd like you to meet my college chums."

"I'm not anxious," said his father after shooting in their direction a keen glance which sized them up.

"But they're all fast friends of mine."

"If they're as fast as you are I don't want to know them."

"We all graduated together."

"Do you mean at college or the Keeley Institute? By the way, did you finish college?"

"I finished it—all but about two buildings; that's why I had to leave. I was the best fencer on the campus, I could lick any man my weight and was star-tackle on the championship football team."

"What did they teach you at college besides manslaughter?" asked his parent with a twinkle in his eye.

"I'll tell you, dad, I wasn't there long enough to find out."

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"Then it's time you got into the harness and began to make money, because you know money talks nowadays. Yes sir, money talks—that's why they have a woman's head on the silver dollar. Understand what I mean? What are your assets at present?"

"A trunk full of medals; eight suits of clothes, three hat boxes and an automobile that can go a mile a minute."

"Yes—for a minute. One of those kind that a child can start, but it takes a stone wall to stop. When you get a job at a salary do you expect to be able to keep an automobile?"

"Nobody keeps an automobile; they only borrow it from the repair shop once in a while. No, really I haven't thought so much about going to work as I have about getting married."

"Thought you'd do that instead, eh?"

"Yes, if I can find an attractive girl of my own mental calibre."

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"That settles it," commented the old man grimly. "You'll have to hunt a long time for a girl of your mental calibre, but if you do find her, don't let her know that's why you picked her out."

His son grinned appreciation of this sally.

"Stung!" he laughed. "But, seriously, dad, how about that thousand—what's a thousand to you?"

"That's not the idea. A thousand's a darned sight more to me than it is to you. Besides, I'm up to my neck in a big deal now and can't take time to monkey with you."

"What's the deal?"

"I'm trying to swing enough stock into line to get control of the Grand Central. That's the only thing I want around here that I haven't got."

"Can't you buy it?"

"Yes, if I can get hold of the owners I can

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buy anything. It's only worth three or four hundred thousand, but I've got to have it to swing the minority the way I want it. This block of Grand Central has been held by an English family for years—ever since the road started."

"Have you approached them?"

"Not personally, but I've traced the heir to the stock, a young chap, Lord Hugh Murray, just over from England. Don't know why he came to Chicago, but I've got to make him sell. I haven't been able to find him at any of the hotels, but I heard he was in here at lunch time yesterday. That's why I came."

"Didn't know you ever ate here."

"Oh, once in a while, because it's handy. Besides, I'm looking this property over. Might turn it into an office building and move my suite over here. Good location—right on the ground floor."

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"The ground floor! That's where you usually are."

While this colloquy between father and son was in progress Con had worked back again to the cashier's desk.

"Did you fix it up all right with Mr. Sears?" inquired Miss Davis a little anxiously.

"Nothin' to it. Bull-con is all you need in this biz, or any other. Take it from me, if a guy can put up the right kind of a front, a pair of deuces is as good as a full house."

"Who is the young man he is talking to?"

"That's his son Harold, a fine young chap who's just got back from a trip to Europe after winding up at college."

"I think he's rather nice looking. Why don't you wear your hair like that? Your collar isn't like his, either."

Con mentally resolved to blossom forth as a

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second edition of Harold in regard to hair dressing and collar, as he hurried forward to escort to the door the elder Sears who had risen to go.

"Sorry you're goin', Mr. Sears," he said. "How did you finish your dinner so quick?"

"I didn't finish it. The best I could get was a draw," he snapped.

His sire gone, Harold Sears became interested once more in his surroundings and his gaze finally became fixed on Jo, who was waiting on his college friends at a nearby table and answering their attempted witticisms with sharp repartee.

"Did you say this duck was wild?" inquired one of them.

"It will be if you cut it like that," she flashed back.

"Say, little one, I'd like to call on you," he went on, "may I?"

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"No, I'm afraid not. Mother won't let me receive callers. But you can send me some candy if you want to."

"All right—but when can I see you again?"

"Come around and take dinner with us this evening. Five to eight is the time."

"Let's see the entrees. What do you serve best?"

"Men who give tips."

"Here, miss, I'll have a Welsh rarebit, some broiled live lobster, imported ale, and a piece of mince pie," said another.

"Would you just as soon write that order out and sign it?" she requested, handing him a pad and a pencil.

"What for?"

"Oh, only as a sort of an alibi for the house to show at the coroner's inquest," she answered wearily, while the others laughed.

Harold called her over to him.

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"Are these French fried potatoes?" he asked.

"Sure—they can't speak a word of English. Did you try talking to 'em?"

He contemplated her for a moment in silence, and she turned her back upon him. She had been casting furtive glances at the manager, ever drawn by the attraction of the magnet behind it to the cashier's desk. Con was leaning towards Miss Davis who was listening with an amused smile to what he was telling her, and Jo now was watching them frankly, misery showing unconsciously in her eyes. Harold, watching her, understood and waxed sympathetic.

"Say, little girl, you're all right," he said kindly. "Do you believe in tips?"

"I don't yet, but I'm willing to be convinced," was the rejoinder.

There was another moment of silence and again her gaze wandered up the room.

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"Brother Con seems to be pretty much interested in the cashier," remarked Harold.

"Sure," replied Jo. "Look at all the money she handles."

"You seem awfully interested in him. Now, straight goods, aren't you?"

"Um—er—what's that? Sure, I'm interested in him. Why shouldn't I be? He's the only pal I've got."

"Isn't he anything more to you?"

The girl's gaze was fixed on the amorous Con who appeared to be in most confidential converse with the beautiful cashier.

"Yeh," she answered mechanically, but realizing the import of the question as she brought her mind back to the customer she added: "Excuse me. What did you say?"

"That's the way I thought it was," he laughed. "Well, I wish you every happiness."

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"Nothing like that, Mister," she said quickly. "You've got it sized up wrong. Elsie over there is the girl for him. Ain't she a swell looker? He's crazy about her and I guess they got it all fixed up."

"But how about you—don't you care?"

She looked at him before she answered, and was attracted by the kindly sympathy in his eyes.

"No—not much—I guess," she said slowly. "I ain't her kind; she's an awful swell looker. They ought to be awful happy." She sighed, and added with effort: "Anyhow, I hope so. Any girl ought to be happy with him. I ain't never had anything, anyway, so I guess I don't mind."

Con, headed off by Miss Davis, who had noticed that attention was being attracted to them advanced with a broad grin towards young Sears.

THE GIRL QUESTION

"Don't tip it off to him what I said," appealed Jo. "Maybe I didn't mean it all."

"Say, little one, what do you take me for?" came the injured but reassuring protest.

"Slip it there, brother," said Con heartily, holding out his hand. "When did you get back? Heard you was across the pond hittin' all the red spots on the map."

"Yes, had the time of my life. How about yourself—had the time of yours, as usual, trying to keep everybody satisfied, I suppose?"

"Sure, but it's a pipe if you know how. I don't want to toss any hothouse violets at myself, but I guess I was built to shoot the bull con and I think I got this game doped about right. All you got to do is to kid all the Indians that blow in—make 'em feel at home. If they're nothin' but piker clerks, why, I jump all over their bosses; then when these fat porch-climbers from La Salle Street blow in, I hand it

THE GIRL QUESTION

to 'em for double-crossin' the small stockholders and shoot the bunk as if I'd been doin' nothing for years but puttin' an awful crimp in the common people. Make every guy think he's the mustard and agree with everything he says, no matter how phoney it is, and you got 'em all nailed to the mast."

Harold laughed.

"What do you do if the cook ever runs out of anything?" he asked.

"If he runs out of the kitchen I go out and coax him back."

"Isn't it hard to hang on to waitresses like that?" inquired the young man indicating a queen-like blonde.

"Try it and see. The real live wire of the place, though, is Elsie, the cashier. Have you put your lamps on her yet?"

"She looks good to me."

"She's as good as she looks, take it from me."

THE GIRL QUESTION

Why, she can separate a guy from an iron louie so easy that he never feels the pain."

"All the waitresses look like perfect ladies, too."

"They are; they can't even wait on the table, but I grabbed 'em all for their looks. Anyway you can get your eyes full here. And pipe the first class language I use on the bill-of-fare. Gee! I wish some of them things tasted the way they look in print."

The manager hurried off, called for by another customer at the opposite side of the room. This brought him once more within the immediate power of Miss Davis, to whom he went as soon as he had mollified the person who had summoned him.

"That young Sears must have a soft job being the son of a multi-millionaire," she observed, by way of resuming the flirtation.

THE GIRL QUESTION

"Sure," laughed Con, "if he's lucky he'll start in waltzin' with boxes at five a week for a wholesale house. Maybe he gets as high as bookkeeper, but that lets him out. A good penman gets fifteen a week; if he's too good he gets fifteen years. There's nothin' to that clerk game. After you perform for twenty years on the high stool, the main squeeze hands you a parachute and shows you where to jump; or if you last to the finish all you come in for is a floral anchor from the boys at the office."

"I'm thinking of going on the stage," she avowed coyly. "Did you know it?"

Con, startled at this announcement, reflected.

"The show business always makes an awful hit with girls, and maybe they're right because when it comes to winnin' a home, a two weeks' course in make-up has got a cookin' school diploma backed off the map," he said. "But you don't need nothin' like that."

THE GIRL QUESTION

"Maybe it's because I hear so many fellows here talking about girls on the stage."

"You mean those seminary striplings that blow in here?" he said contemptuously. "Say, take it from me, any time you hear one of those squabs tipping it off in a loud voice that he's a ten-strike with the merry-merrys it's a hundred to one he never got nearer to a chorus girl than the other end of the field glasses."

He straightened up as an elaborately and garishly dressed woman entered with a man whose eyeglass, long drooping moustache, checkerboard suit and spats labeled him as an Englishman.

"Pipe, lady," said Con in an undertone to the cashier, "here's Mrs. Jessie Sears, Mr. Sears' new wife, who used to be his steno. The old guy got dotty about her and finally waltzed her down the long chute with the parson at the other end. That was only a few months

THE GIRL QUESTION

ago, but say, if you led her up to a typewriter now, she'd shy and go right over the fence without touching her hands. Honest, you wouldn't think to look at her that only a year ago she was one of those 'Dear sir' ladies waltz-in' with the lettered keys. She can't get it out of her system, though. Every time she hears a bell she does this—"

And Con went through the motion of pushing a typewriter carriage back to the end of the line.

"I know all about her," Elsie told him. "They say she's crazy to get into society, but can't do it."

"You're right. If she could make as much of a hit with the Potter Palmers and the McCormicks as she used to with the Smith-Premiers and the Remingtons, she wouldn't do nothin' but pass herself large clusters of begonias all day long."

THE GIRL QUESTION

"But who's that with her? He was in here yesterday and everybody was staring at him."

"From the way his clothes fit him he's a rhinoceros. Somebody said he was a lord—Lord Hugh Murray. I'll go and find out what menagerie he escaped from."



"A WAITRESS! MOST EXTRAORDINARY, UPON MY WORD."

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CHAPTER IV

Mrs. Jessie Sears swept over to Jo Sargent's tables and selected one adjacent to that occupied by Harold Sears, who did not notice them for the reason that they were seated behind him. Lord Murray, having adjusted his companion's chair with much ceremony, contemplated Jo through his monocle with evident approval.

"Most extraordinary young woman," he exclaimed reaching for the astonished Jo's hand and shaking it vigorously. "Glad to know you, by Jove. What might you be?"

"I might be the Statue of Liberty, but I ain't. I'm a waitress," replied the girl curtly.

"A waitress! Most extraordinary, upon my word. Allow me to congratulate you," and he

THE GIRL QUESTION

shook hands again with her warmly. "Might I ask if you serve onions here?"

"Sure—sit down."

She drew a chair back for him and presented a pad.

"Write your order, please."

While he was complying with the request Mrs. Sears addressed her escort gushingly, uttering his title in a high voice for the benefit of the interested diners.

"Oh, Lord Murray," she said, "I started to tell you about the terrible accident I saw over on State Street. I was standing in front of one of Marshall Field's store windows, looking at some French organdies—they had one there just like Mrs. Van Ogden Nordyke wore to the Smythe-Fish wedding—it was a terribly swell affair. Genevieve Smythe is the girl who was engaged to the Baron Hochstadt last season when it was discovered he wasn't a real Baron

THE GIRL QUESTION

at all and they had the worst time——Oh, yes what was it I started to tell you about?"

"Most extraordinary!" exclaimed Lord Murray, bewildered by her volubility.

Con arrived with his property smile of geniality and rubbing his hands after the most approved manner of bonifaces as he had seen them represented on the stage.

"Everything all right?" he inquired.

"Ripping, I assure you, old top," answered the lord, rising and shaking hands. "Glad to know you, I'm sure."

"Same here," Con assured him. "Welcome to the village. What are you going to do—flirt with a mess of pork and—, or wrestle a sirloin for the best two out of three?"

"Most extraordinary!" commented Lord Murray, who did not understand.

"He wants to know what we are going to eat," explained Mrs. Sears.

THE GIRL QUESTION

"Ha, ha! Extraordinary! I have given our order to the serving woman."

"Have you been here long?" questioned Con.

"No, old chap, just arrived. I was out to the stockyards this morning. Most extraordinary! I heard one of those American jokes there. I think it is jolly. Would you like to hear it?"

"Sure! I ain't had a good laugh since I seen you come in the door."

"The question is, 'Why is the Fourth of July?' You should say, 'I don't know.'"

"All right, I pass. Why is the Fourth of July?"

"'J' is the first, 'U' is the second, 'L' is the third and 'Y' is the Fourth of July."

No one laughed or appeared to understand, and the Englishman, surprised, repeated it.

"'J' is the first, 'U' is the second, 'L' is the third and 'Y' is the Fourth of July."

THE GIRL QUESTION

"What's the answer?" demanded Con with an air of great interest.

"'Y' is the Fourth of July. Doesn't it make you laugh?"

"It does the way you tell it. Say, I heard a kind of a funny crack myself to-day. There were two Irishmen talking. One of them said, 'I hear that Casey died without the aid of a doctor.' The other guy thought a minute, then he said, 'Casey always was handy at anything.'"

"Ah! ah!" laughed his lordship, while the others preserved solemn countenances. "Capital, by Jove! Most extraordinary! Do you know, America is quite different from what I expected. Fancy, I thought this place was full of Indians."

"It is, after twelve o'clock."

"Really? My word!"

"Sure—most everybody you see here has got Indian blood in his veins."

THE GIRL QUESTION

"Have you?"

"Yes—my mother was an Injun."

"Really?"

"Yeh—and my old man was an engineer. By the by," added Con, addressing Mrs. Sears, "I ain't seen you here since you used to punch the keys."

"Sir!!!" she exclaimed indignantly, shooting a withering glance at him.

"That's all right, sister," said the manager hastily. "I didn't mean nothin'." Then, seeking to cause a diversion, he went on: "Did you know your son was sitting right back of you? I mean your husband's son."

Lord Murray adjusted his eyeglass to look at Harold.

"Your son!" he commented. "Most extraordinary! I don't see how you can have such an old son."

THE GIRL QUESTION

"She married an old son-of-a-gun," whispered Con, confidentially.

"Anyone would know he was your son, he's the dead image of you," said his lordship, addressing Mrs. Sears.

"Dead image? You should see him when he turns up after a night at the poison counter," put in the manager.

Mrs. Sears, dumbfounded and visibly perturbed, had been gazing at Harold. She quickly recovered her sang-froid however.

"He's not really mine," she explained. "He's the son of my husband by a former marriage. I don't think he knows yet that I married his father. Excuse me while I speak to him."

She went over to Harold's table and sat down in front of him. He jumped to his feet and a smile of pleasure overspread his countenance as he held out his hand in cordial greeting.

"Why, Jessie," he exclaimed, "how are you?"

THE GIRL QUESTION

Pretty as ever, I see. I'd kiss you if the cashier wasn't looking."

"No, you wouldn't!"

"Sit down and help me out with this steak."

"I can't, but I'll 'phone for the police. I'm with a friend."

"That so! Still the biggest coquette that ever wrote 'yours truly!' "

"You look as if you had a headache."

"Yes, I couldn't sleep all night."

"Why not?"

"I didn't get in early enough. Honest, my block feels as if it was full of knot-holes and aches like a tooth. Last night I had a fine collection of rare birds and animals that ought to be traveling with Hagenbeck's show."

"And to-day, I suppose, you've got a stylish Alice Blue taste in your mouth. Remember, early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise."

THE GIRL QUESTION

"If I always went to bed early I wouldn't be wise to lots of things."

There was a pause in the conversation and Mrs. Sears waxed reflective.

"Let's see," she said, "you're through college now, aren't you? Did you get much out of your college work?"

"I got out all of it that I could. Are you still with my old man?"

She gazed at him with a peculiar look as she answered:

"Yes, why?"

"I was wondering if you couldn't help me get a couple of thousand out of him some way."

"You wouldn't swindle your father?"

"Sure! It's a wise son that does his own father. Honest, Jessie, if I had two thousand dollars I'd be tempted to marry you. I've thought of you often since I've been away. You know we were awfully good chums. We could

THE GIRL QUESTION

be happy together. We could go to some other country. Of course, if we did that the old man would fire you."

"It would be worse than that!" laughed the woman.

"Jessie, old girl," he entreated, "say the word."

Before she could reply, Lord Murray advanced to the table diffidently.

"I say, Mrs. Sears," he said. "You—"

"Who's he talking to?" interrupted Harold, surprised at this designation of the former typewriter, and annoyed by the stranger's untimely advent.

"Oh, it's me," she said sweetly, "I married your father last month."

"You married dad!"

Harold half rose from his chair in his amazement.

THE GIRL QUESTION

"Then you're my mother?" he gasped.
"Great Scott!"

"Harold," said the woman calmly, introducing the stranger, "this is Lord Murray. Lord Murray, my stepson, Mr. Harold Sears."

"Most extraordinary! Glad to know you, old chap," and Lord Murray grasped his hand and pumped it energetically.

"Yes," said Harold, still dazed, "I'm glad to know myself. I don't know my own mother!"

Mrs. Sears, in her anxiety to relieve the strain of the situation, began to pour forth a flood of words in which, as usual, she ended by losing herself.

"Your father has an auto, now," she confided to Harold. "It's a French machine. I do love anything French, don't you? My latest gown is a Paris model, Madame O'Brien made it. You've heard of Madame O'Brien? She lives on that street where we saw the little poodle dog

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yesterday. I'm going to have one of those dogs. They just match my new furs. It was the funniest thing how I happened to pick out those furs. I was walking along State Street when who should come along but Mrs. Moran, you know the one that was riding in her machine when that awful accident occurred on Madison street. I must tell you about that accident. Oh, yes—what was it I started to say?"

"I've just heard a ripping conundrum about America—jolly country America," interjected the Englishman.

"That so? What is it?"

"The question is, 'Why is the Fourth of July?' You should answer, 'I don't know.'"

"I don't know."

"The answer is ripping. I laugh to think of it."

"Why is the Fourth of July?"

"'J' is the first, 'U' is the second, 'L' is the

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third and 'Y' is the Fourth of July. The first time I heard that I laughed till I cried, really I did. Your American jokes are so jolly."

"Yes, aren't they?" responded Harold dubiously. "Well, I must ask you to excuse me, sir, and—er—mother, I have to be going."

He rose and they took leave of him and returned to their table while Harold asked Jo for his check.

"Your cashier friend there seems to be about the biggest attraction in this place," he remarked to the girl. "I've been watching her manœuvres with those carnations. She's fooled about every customer who has gone out. Look at that fellow now. She'll have the time of her life getting me to stop to talk to her, though."

On his way towards the desk he was held for a moment by Con, who passed a few remarks with him that caused the young man to laugh.

Meanwhile, Jo, in a spirit of mischief, had

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slipped over to the desk and repeated his boast to Miss Davis.

"Oh, he said that, did he?" commented the girl grimly. "Well, I'll have to teach him. I think I'd like to talk to him, anyway."

Harold, with a brisk air, handed over a bill with his check.

"Do you want the change in bills or silver?" she inquired.

"Bills, please," he said brusquely.

"Silver's handier for tips."

"That's why I want bills. And please hurry, I've got to catch a train. Is that clock right?"

"Just wait a moment, I'll see."

She drew forth a closed case watch and fumbled with it.

"Would you mind opening it for me?" she requested, looking up suddenly and gazing full into his eyes. "It sticks."

Confused by the large violet orbs to which

THE GIRL QUESTION

a conjured soulfulness had imparted further fascination, he took the timepiece, and she bent over to watch him—bent so far that her hair touched his cheek. In brushing back her hair her hand touched his.

“Oh, pardon me. Can’t you open it?” she murmured.

“I—I—think I’ve broken it,” he stammered. “Or else it was broken before—was it?”

“Not that I know of—”

“Then of course I’ll be responsible for it.”

“Oh, it isn’t that, only it’s a present.”

“That’s the kind of watch people always give as presents.”

“This was given to me by someone who is very dear to me,” she said with some haughtiness, turning away.

“Forgive me, I didn’t really mean that,” he said contritely. “Honestly, I think it’s very pretty.”

THE GIRL QUESTION

He started to gather up his change, but while she confused him with her eyes again she slyly pushed some of the money off the desk.

"There!" she exclaimed. "You've knocked three dollars on to the floor."

Apologetically he went down on his knees to hunt for the coins. When he rose he was very red in the face.

"I hope I got them all," he said, "because I have to hurry to catch that train. Oh, but I forgot about breaking your watch. Please let me take it and have it fixed. Here, I'll leave you mine."

In passing it over to her his hand touched hers. Neither his grasp nor hers was very secure and the contact lasted fully a minute before the timepiece was safe in her possession.

"Say," said Harold, gazing at her admiringly and forgetting all about the fable of the train, "would you mind telling me what time you get off?"

THE GIRL QUESTION

"All the time I can."

"No, really, it's a shame for you to work the way you do," he declared.

"It's a shame for *anybody* to work the way I do."

"How many people do you accommodate here?"

"We never accommodate anybody."

"Seriously, now; when can I see you again?"

"Do come over to dinner sometimes. We'll be so glad to see you."

"We? Who's we?"

"Why, the management and I. Wait just one moment."

She kept him waiting while she selected a carnation from the bunch in the vase, then changed her mind, took a white one she was wearing herself and fastened it over his heart. Three or four other men waiting impatiently to pay their checks began to murmur and pass

THE GIRL QUESTION

uncomplimentary witticisms. Harold, wearing the badge proclaiming his subjection and the beautiful cashier's triumph glared at them and walked away rapidly, going in his confusion in the direction opposed to the exit, until he was brought up by Jo, who confronted him with mocking gaze and a grin of amusement.

"You're off your trolley, mister. That's the place to get out, over there," she said.

"Damn!" he ejaculated, and, red and perspiring, hurried out without daring to glance in the direction of the cashier's desk.

CHAPTER V

In response to signs from Lord Murray, Con, who had just returned from interviewing the cook, went over to him.

"I came within an inch of killing a coon in that kitchen," he remarked.

"Really?" said his lordship. "Why didn't you?"

"You ain't allowed to kill coons in this country any more."

"During what months?"

"Well, the close season is generally in the summer."

"Ah, ah! I see—a joke. Did I tell you that ripping story I heard about why is the Fourth of July?"

"Whoa!" protested Con. "Back up there. Pack that funny story of yours in the moth balls

THE GIRL QUESTION

and we'll still be friends. For an Englishman you ain't so bad."

"Well, rather. You know the sun never sets on the English."

"No, it wouldn't do any good."

"Our motto is, 'England forever.'"

"And ours is, 'America for everything else.'"

"In my country I am an M. P."

"Shake, I'm a K. P. myself—life member."

His lordship became serious and assumed a business-like air.

"I wanted to tell you," he said, "that I came to this restaurant for two reasons—"

"Pardon me," interrupted Mrs. Sears, "I understood you to say you had business to transact here. I have some shopping to do. Would you mind escorting me to the automobile?"

"Not at all! Not at all!" the Englishman assured her. "Pray allow me."

THE GIRL QUESTION

He saw her comfortably ensconced in the waiting motor car and returned to the table.

"As I observed," he resumed, addressing Con, "I came here for two reasons. The first is I wished to meet a young lady I saw last evening in one of your music halls. She was one of the dancers. I think she was quite taken with me, don't you know. Wrote me a note saying she would meet me here to-day. She is to wear a red rose like this one in my buttonhole. A stunning creature, really."

"Yeh, I know the kind. They look great at night, especially if you've got a little biograph water under your belt. Honest, if those crows looked the same off the stage as they do on, Klaw and Erlanger would have to put on melodramas. As it is, they do pretty well at the marriage game. They may not be there with all the grammar in the book, but if you've got a shape that makes your clothes look as if they

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were glued on, you don't need a college education."

"This one looked quite young, don't you know—not over seventeen."

"The old ladies' home is full of them dames that was workin' on the end in last season's summer shows. It ain't fair to a chorus girl to look at her in the daylight. Any guy that marries one of 'em is takin' chances if he don't have his flat fitted up with footlights and an orchestra."

"Do you think a chap who is getting 20,000 a year ought to be married?"

"Be married? He ought to be arrested!"

"Well, this young lady is coming here very shortly—she should be here now. There is one other reason I came here. I am trying to trace a person of the name of Sargent in this country. I understand there is a waitress of that name working here. From what I've been able to

THE GIRL QUESTION

learn about her father I think she's the one I'm looking for. Can I speak with her?"

"Sure, but I never heard her talk about her father. She'll be in in a minute and I'll tip you off to her. She's one of the best crockery jugglers in the whole place. She may be a little bit phoney on her spellin', but her heart is in the right place, and I'd rather have her for a pal than any man I know. Me and her was brought up together, so I'm wise to what kind of a dame she is. She's on the square, take it from me. An' say, while you're lookin' the shop over don't forget little Elsie—the lady that separates the sword-swallowers from their hard-earned louies."

"Does what?"

"Makes the change from the cage—plays solitaire with the cash register."

"Oh, the cashier!"

THE GIRL QUESTION

"How did you guess it? She's the principal sponge cake around here. Honest, the way she's got 'em all back in the corner hangin' onto the ropes is a shame. If she'd only say the word there's a lot of married guys around here would begin slippin' Paris green into the breakfast food at home. When she turns her lamps on one of these boys that's sellin' mining shares because he's a little too old to be handy with the lead pipe, he's as good as roped and thrown with the sponge under his nose."

"You've taken rather a fancy to the young lady in question yourself, have you not?"

"If I dared, I'd up and ask her to waltz over to the gospel sharp's to-morrow. But I ain't in her class. I'm all right when it comes to kiddin' with a dame about shows and baseball, but on this love talk thing I'm as light and graceful as a pile driver."

"I have an idea, old top. Why not write her

THE GIRL QUESTION

a letter saying that you offer her your hand, and all that sort of thing, you know?"

"Would that be the proper stunt?"

"Well, I should say so—rather. That's the way it's always done in England. You could ask her to answer by some token—a flower or something. Rather a pretty piece of sentiment, I think. A deuced good idea. For instance, tell her to leave a white carnation on the desk if she accepts you and a red one if she refuses you."

"It ain't so bad at that. Maybe I'll try it. Here's the shirtwaist you're lookin' for," he added as the waitress reappeared. "Jo, come here. Here's a gent wants to spiel with you. This is Josephine Sargent."

The girl looked at Lord Murray inquiringly, wondering that Con should have referred to her by her name.

"Indeed! So you are Josephine Sargent?"

THE GIRL QUESTION

Well, well! Won't you take a chair?" said his lordship kindly, rising.

"Where to, sir?" she inquired, immediately on the defensive and bringing her impudent repartee into play for the purpose of parrying.

"I mean, won't you be seated so we can chat, don't you know, because I can't sit down while a lady is standing."

"Are you going to stay over here?"

"My word! Of course not! It's too busy. The noise and all that sort of thing would disturb my peace of mind."

"Have you only a piece? Say, I didn't mean that. What do you think of the country, anyway? Have you seen the Adirondacks?"

"The Adirondacks? Is one of them dark and rather tall?"

"Yes—about five thousand feet above the sea level. But say, mister, put me wise. What's your game, anyhow," she demanded suspiciously

THE GIRL QUESTION

as she sat down on the edge of the chair and regarded him sharply.

"Well, I play polo a great deal."

"I ain't on, but I guess you muffed what I said. What I mean is, put me next to what you want."

"My dear young lady, it's you I want, not something *next* to you."

"Nothing like that," retorted the girl decisively, rising to her feet.

For the first time the good natured Englishman manifested slight impatience.

"Sit down," he commanded. "I'm here to talk serious business with you. Wasn't your father Charles Maurice Sargent, from Dorchester, England?"

"Yes," replied Jo, reassured by his change of tone and manner and resuming her seat.

"I came over here to bring you some most extraordinary news—all the way from England

THE GIRL QUESTION

to find you," he went on. "Do you know you have fourteen relatives in England whom you have never seen?"

"A fortune-teller told me once I was born lucky."

"Yes—it's great luck to have fourteen relations."

"Yes—that you've never seen. But how do you know all this about me?"

"I'll get to that. What was the exact date when your father died?"

"Let's see—if he had lived one month longer he would have been dead five years."

"Most extraordinary!"

"Yes, isn't it?"

"Do you know anything about your ancestors?"

"I remember hearing I was related to Lord Somebody on my father's side."

"Who was on your mother's side?"

THE GIRL QUESTION

"She didn't need anybody on her side. She used a rolling pin."

"Did your father leave you anything?"

"He left me an orphan."

Lord Murray gazed at her indulgently, a smile playing around his mouth.

"You Yankees are most extraordinary at spoofing," he said.

"Yeh—something like that," assented the girl.

"As I remember," he continued, "your father went rather from bad to worse after he came over here, and the last we heard was that he had died in a public hospital as a result of drunkenness. Poor girl. Then you never knew what it was to have a head in your family?"

"Sure, father *always* had one; that's what finished him."

"Were did you see him last?"

"The only place I ever saw him last any

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length of time was Murphy's saloon. He used to last till about four o'clock."

"Did he leave a will?"

"If he did, that's *all* he left."

"Did your father ever tell you anything about his family in England? Did he ever tell you what you were?"

"Yes—every night."

"What was it?"

"I'm too polite to tell."

"Didn't you ever try to trace your relatives in England?"

"No—it was hard enough to trace my father in Chicago. Say, mister, I don't want you to think I ain't got any heart. I know it sounds kind of funny to talk about the old man like this, but if you'd been through what I have maybe you'd be kind of sore on the world. Anyway, if your old gent had been like mine, you wouldn't be erecting no Washington monuments

THE GIRL QUESTION

over him unless you wanted to be sure and keep him down. All he used to do was to see how much he could carry without falling down, and the only baby tricks he taught me was to hike over to Murphy's for ten cents worth in the water pitcher. Do you think it easy to remember nice things about a man like that and weep because he's cashed in? I've had to fight for everything I ever got, an' maybe I'm kind of phoney and lippy and have got lots of brass, but if I'd followed his training, I'd be a lot worse. The last thing I remember about the old gent was when I had to send him fifty to get him out on bail—a week later he sent me two dollars of my own coin as a Christmas present. Can you tie that?"

"Can't say I blame you, on my word," said his lordship sympathetically. "But your hard luck days are over. That's what I came to tell you. You are the direct heiress to about

THE GIRL QUESTION

one hundred and thirty thousand pounds, part of the fortune of the late Lord Robert Sargent, your father's father. Allow me to be the first to congratulate you."

He rose and shook hands with her with his accustomed heartiness.

"A hundred and thirty thousand pounds of what?" questioned the girl coolly.

"Why, pounds sterling—English money—of course."

"Is it any good over here?"

"Most certainly."

"One hundred and thirty thousand pounds! How much is that in samoleons—I mean iron dollars?"

"About five hundred thousand dollars."

"Gee! add that onto my seven a week and it would be pretty good, wouldn't it? Say, are you sure all this coin is mine?"

"Positively. Your father's brother married

THE GIRL QUESTION

Lady Castlewood, but they had no children. My lawyers were looking for your father three years without finding him."

"They couldn't have looked in Murphy's."

"Strange I should find you in a place like this."

"I don't know—this ain't a very large place. Say, did you come over just to find me and tell me about this?"

"Yes. I'm your second cousin. In case I didn't find you the money would have gone to me."

Astonished, incredulous, she gazed at him for the first time squarely. Trained as a child to shift for herself, among people who excelled in getting the best of others and preying upon each other's weaknesses, having learned by experience as a young girl to be wary of honeyed traps set for her, of Greeks bearing gifts, and of accepting words at their face value, she

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could not believe that such probity and magnanimity existed. But absolute honesty shone in the kindly eyes that met her scrutiny as he waited for her to speak. Lord Murray seemed by nature incapable of fooling anybody. His pleasure at her amazement and at being the herald of the wonderful tidings was apparent. Slowly the suspicious look died out, and her eyes moistened as she in turn held out her hand to this relative who had dropped as it were from the skies.

"I want to shake hands with you," she said gently. "It was a mighty white thing for you to hunt me up this way, when you might have had the coin. I can hardly believe it."

"Not at all," he replied, "I'd do anything to oblige a lady, don't you know. The money, as you will see, is mostly in the form of a block of stock in the Grand Central Railroad. The

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stock has been in our family for years—ever since the road was organized. It will require some time to settle the details of transferring the property, but then you will be able to go back to England and take your rightful place as a titled lady of our family.”

She regarded him quizzically.

“You’re afraid I might do it, aren’t you? she said. “No, nothing like that for mine. I wasn’t brought up to be a titled lady, so what’s the use?”

For a moment she remained thoughtful, then added, as though talking to herself:

“There’s only one thing I want very much, but you can’t give it to me. Nobody in England can—”

“You mean you love someone—here?” he queried, at a venture.

“Yes, but he ain’t for me, so what’s the use?”

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she sighed. "I never could have anything I wanted when I was a kid, and I guess I can't now."

Con at this juncture interrupted them, and Jo promptly resumed her rôle of waitress.

"Say, mister, here comes two of the fairies from the show shop," announced the manager.

"Which one has got the date with you?"

His lordship looked up and saw at the entrance two flashily dressed women.

"'Pon my word, old chap, I can't say," he declared, adjusting his monocle. "What an extraordinary coincidence—both are wearing red roses."

Con went up to the women and greeted them effusively.

"Welcome, little stranger Tessie, and you, Sybil," he said, but at once backed away brushing face powder off his coat.

"Say," he remarked, "you girls wouldn't need

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any card to prove that you're union kalso-miners. The plaster is falling off the lathes."

"Don't get flossy with a lady jest because she works," retorted Tessie. "You have to put a little on to keep from gettin' tanned."

"That's all right, sister," he assured her. "Come on over and meet a tapioca that says he's dotty about you—him over there, the guy with his clothes cut out of a horse-blanket by a one-armed man with the St. Vitus dance."

The women swept over to the table with him and he presented them.

"Lord Murray, this is Tessie. Tess, this is Lord Murray. Ditto Sybil," he added indicating her to his lordship with a wave of his hand. "Sybil is a little pale under her ears now where she can't see herself in the glass, but she's all right. Sit down and get acquainted. What'll it be?"

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"I never can eat anything this early in the morning," yawned Sybil.

"In the morning!" exclaimed Lord Murray.
"This is afternoon."

"It's always morning to these people until the overture rings in at 8:15," explained Con.

"I couldn't eat a thing, either," declared Tessie. "Let's have a couple of quarts. Some of that '84 label—you know, Con."

"Sure I know. I'll tell the poison clerk it's for you," he said, as he hurried off.

"Tell me, how did you come to go on the stage?" inquired Lord Murray with interest.

"Well a fortune-teller once told me I was going to be an actress," avowed Tessie.

"It's strange those fortune-tellers never make any better guesses than they do," commented Sybil.

Tessie regarded her disdainfully.

"Never you mind. The manager told me

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last night that anybody that can act the way I can oughtn't to be in the chorus," she said.

"No, they ought to be in the penitentiary," put in Con, who had returned with the bottles.

Lord Murray picked up the bottles and examined them.

"We ordered wine of the vintage of 1884, and this bottle has 1907 on it," he said.

"Is that so?" answered Con. "I'll have that fixed at once. Here, Jo, take this bottle out and tell the booze clerk to take twenty-three years off this label. Put on an 1884."

He followed her, and the Englishman resumed his conversation with the girls.

"Really, girls, I was just dying to see you off the stage" he told them.

"The whole audience would like to see us off the stage," said Sybil.

"Tell me, are there any more at home like you?"

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"Say," answered Tessie, "if they was like us they wouldn't be at home."

"It must take a lot of nerve to wear tights the way you do."

"It takes a lot of nerve for some people to wear tights the way they do," answered Sybil, looking hard at Tessie.

Tessie flared up indignantly.

"Do you mean me?" she demanded. "I wouldn't talk if I were you. Anybody that knows how you bleach your hair— Besides, I've played parts, and that's more than you can say. I used to play Jack, in 'Jack and the Beanstalk.'"

"Now she plays the beanstalk," remarked Con as he arrived with the fresh bottles. "Don't mind what she says. The peroxide has filtered through into the grey matter."

Lord Murray was anxious to turn the con-



"I WOULDN'T TALK IF I WERE YOU. ANYBODY KNOWS YOU BLEACH
YOUR HAIR."

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versation from the quarrelsome turn it had taken.

"I say, girls," he said genially, "I want to tell you a ripping story. It starts like this: 'Why is the Fourth of July?'"

"Wait a minute," interrupted Con hastily. "I'll set up another quart of foolish water if you'll agree not to tell that while I'm around."

Tessie, having imbibed four glasses of champagne, suddenly became very circumspect.

"What do you suppose would happen if anyone should come in here and see us drinking wine with a strange man?" she wanted to know.

"I can't imagine," declared Sybil, "we would both be terribly compromised."

"Really?" exclaimed Lord Murray. "Upon my word! I didn't know that your American customs were so strict as that."

"There goes our stage manager now," she

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said, pointing to the window and shrinking back, "I know he'll fire us."

"Deuce take, I'm sorry," said the Englishman with concern. "Can't anything be done?"

"I can't think of anything unless you were engaged to one of us," suggested Tessie with ingenuous candor as she tried to throw a dreamy expression into her eyes.

"Oh, is that all?" said Lord Murray. "Why bless my soul, I'll be engaged to both of you—really." He rose and shook hands with them. "That settles that matter. I'll be round to see you next week. It's customary to see one's fiancée that often in this country, is it not? Will you send your names and addresses to my secretary? Thanks, awfully. Shall we go for a drive?"

There was nothing the girls could think of that would suit them so well as a drive at that par-

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ticular hour, when all the chorus girls and chorus men would be fringing the curbs of the theatre district, so the party went out as soon as an automobile which Lord Murray had Con telephone for, arrived at the restaurant door.

CHAPTER VI

Jo, putting her tables in order, was thinking of the luck that had come to her by this strange turn of the wheel of fortune.

"Five hundred thousand! she muttered. "Gee! that's an awful bundle of money. I guess we could fix up this restaurant pretty swell with that—him and me. Aw, what's the use? I ain't one, two, seven with Elsie, anyway. She's a swell looker. They'll look great together. I don't care, I never had anything I wanted, anyhow."

Mr. T. P. Q. Sears came in with a companion, evidently an architect, for he said to him loudly:

"Now I want to take out all those partitions in there and make it look more like an office—

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no, your first plans won't do. Nothing like it at all. Go in there and measure up those rooms. Understand what I mean?"

The great man looked around, recognized Jo, and sat down at her table.

"Going to fix the place up?" she inquired. "You own this property, don't you?"

"No, but maybe I will in a few days," he replied. "No, I don't want to eat any more here to-day. I'm just waiting. Got to thinking about you this afternoon. I kind of like the way you talk. If you ever want a job, come to my office. How much are you making here?"

"Seven a week for myself and a hundred for the management."

"I'll give you a job as stenographer. I need one now. A stenographer is very valuable. In a man's confidence his stenographer should be next to his wife."

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"But his wife should never be next to his stenographer. What became of your last stenographer?"

"I married her."

"Because she knew her business?"

"No, because she knew mine. Yes, sir, when she was a stenographer my wife took all the prizes for doing more words a minute than any other stenographer in Chicago. She is still taking prizes."

"Is it by such methods as that that you have succeeded in business, Mr. Sears?"

The man looked at her, in doubt for a moment whether he ought to laugh or be angry.

"Oh, well!" he exclaimed. "Let it go. I don't mind telling *you* my methods, girl. I rather like you, and the advice might be useful. It's pretty simple and it makes good to my mind even if it isn't taught in the Y. M. C. A. Take everything you can get even if you have to steal

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it, because everybody else is trying to do the same thing. Understand what I mean? Everybody worships the man that's got it in government bonds, so if I've got more bonds than most men I'm a better man than they are, because we're all after the same thing. Don't care how you get it—just take it. Keep away from the Grand Jury and give stained glass windows to your church, and you're a great man."

"I've never got anything I didn't have to fight for. Maybe we've both been up against it and learned that way," said the girl.

"That's the only line to follow if you want to make good," he assured her rising as the architect reappeared. "Remember it, because it may come in handy some time. If you have a chance to get what you want without getting caught at it, why take it."

"If you have a chance to get what you want,

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take it," she muttered, gazing after him. "To get what I want! I guess that don't apply to love—getting the man you want."

Con, as though divining that she was thinking of him, came over to her. During Sears' visit he had been upstairs and therefore knew nothing of what had been going on. Jo did not judge it necessary to enlighten him.

"Did I tell you the boss was going to give me an interest in the business?" he observed casually.

"No," she answered.

"Well, it's on the level. I get twenty-five per cent. of the profits after New Year's. I always did want to get into the company."

"Get into the company? Why didn't you grab the cash register?"

"Honest, Jo, I thought I'd tell you this new pipe of mine because I knew you'd be interested. I've known you since the time I used to be

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wearin' paper collars and you used to be chasin' the can for your father on Sundays. That's a long time ago, ain't it? We was tough kids then, but we stuck together. I remember when I licked Skinny O'Brien fer swipin' a nickel off you an' you washed me mug fer me after it was all over. You couldn't 'a' been a better pal if you'd been a boy. We was awful poor then. Now, maybe it'll be different. I ought to clean up a bunch of Uncle Sam's promissory notes on the beanery here. Don't you think it's about time for me to get married?"

"Better wait till late in the afternoon. The rush hour'll be all over then."

"No kiddin', Jo; do you think I could make a wife happy?"

"That would depend on whose wife it was. I know one woman you could make happy."

"D'ye mean her?" he asked, glancing longingly towards Miss Davis. "Nothin' to it, Jo."

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When she smiles in my direction, I'm hangin' onto the ropes waitin' for the tap of the bell. Do you think I'd ever be lucky enough to win her?"

"You might be even luckier than that."

"What's that?"

"I said you'd be awful lucky if you did."

"She's the real thing all right. She wasn't brought up to work in a place like this. She ain't like you and me. You can tell breedin' every time."

"Sure, you can tell it every time."

"Do you suppose she knows I'm in love with her?"

"Yes."

"What makes you think she does?"

"Oh, because she's a woman, and that's all women have to think about."

"Do you suppose she likes it?"

"Any woman is flattered to be loved by any

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man, even if she has hundreds to love her and he has no one."

"That what you said about hundreds to love her is about right. Honest, it would keep an expert accountant workin' over time for a week to straighten out her date book. When she goes along La Salle street she blocks the traffic worse than a G. A. R. parade with a brass band, and all the bank presidents in the high buildings hang out over the sills like window washers tryin' to flag her as she goes by. I wonder, would it make any difference to her because I ain't much on education an' such things?"

"If I loved a man," said Jo slowly, "it wouldn't make any difference if he was a tramp and I was—and I was one of the great ladies of England."

He looked at her in surprise.

"Gee!" he exclaimed, "you must be in love with somebody, too."

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But his mind was too full of the object of his own adoration to be interested to any extent in the love affairs of his boyhood tomboy chum.

"I know I ain't got much, but I'm goin' to boom the business so as to have somethin' to offer her, an' I want you to help me," he went on. "You will help me win her, won't you?"

Had he been looking at her he would have seen a peculiar expression in her eyes, and an inkling of the situation might have dawned upon his keen perception; but he saw nothing. There was almost a sob in her voice as she answered:

"I'd help you get anything you were sure you wanted."

"You know I'm sort of an onion when it comes to tearin' off this Ella Wheeler Wilcox language with a shirt-waist," he continued apologetically. "I can pull barber-shop conversation with a lady just as good as anybody,

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but if it ever got down to a case of lookin' a gazelle square in the eye and askin' her to marry, I'd be apt to throw a shoe. Say, you never proposed to anybody, did you?"

"I should say not."

"I thought maybe you could give me some pointers on how it was done. Say, why not let me try it on you once? Let's pretend you're the girl I'm in love with. There's no one in the place. She's gone out, and the waitresses are fixing up their back hair somewheres."

She shrank back.

"Won't it be hard for you to pretend that?"

"It would be kind of funny, wouldn't it, to pretend I wanted to marry you?" he said, still too engrossed in his own emotions to notice the suspicion of bitterness in her query.

"That's as near as some people ever get to things they want—just pretending," sighed the girl.

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"I'll try it. You're Elsie. I'm me. I say, 'Little one, do you think you and me could ever go out flat huntin' together? Could you dope it out so's we could sit evenin's by the gas grate an' listen to the wind flirtin' with the storm windows? Is there a chance in the world for anything like that?' "

He took her hand, and she averted her face, struggling to keep back the hot tears that welled from her wounded heart.

"Why don't you answer?" he demanded.

"Don't, Con," she entreated, withdrawing her hand with a sudden movement. "Don't talk to me like that. I can't bear it."

"I knew I was a bad actor but I thought I done pretty well that time," he grinned, never for a moment imagining that she was not acting herself. "Maybe it's because I knew it was only a joke."

"Yes, Con, it was only a joke," she repeated,

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regaining control of herself by a mighty effort in which pride came to her aid. "Let's not talk about it any more."

"I got to think of somethin' else. That Englishman told me the proper stunt was to write the dame a letter. I guess I'll do that. You can help me write it, because I got to ask her some way to-day before she quits the shop for good to go on the stage. She's got a job in the chorus and is going next week. Did she tell you?"

"She never told me anything about it."

"Well, wait a minute while I get some paper and a pen."

In a moment he returned, and, seating himself opposite to her, took up the pen awkwardly and began to think, while she with tightly pressed lips watched him in silence.

"How would you begin this?" he demanded helplessly. "'Miss E. Davis—dear Madam?'"

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"That sounds rather formal, doesn't it?" she demurred.

"Maybe it is a little stiff. How'll I start?"

"Just start. Don't call her anything and you can't go wrong."

He began to write, and after crumpling up three false starts succeeded in producing something that he read and re-read with evident satisfaction.

"How's this?" he said at last, reading it aloud: "'I ain't the President of the First National Bank, but when the pipe is drawing right, I can figure out where I can get the coin to pay for the installments on enough red plush furniture to do for two people. Would you be willing to hold down the other end of the breakfast table from me for life? If you would, leave a white carnation on your desk for me when you leave. If you can't see me with a spy glass, break it to me with a red one in the same place."

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Yours, Con.' I hope I used regular dictionary spellin' on that. How does it look to you?"

She took it from him and perused it.

"It looks all right," she approved. "How are you going to give it to her?"

"That's where you come to the front. You put it in this envelope and hand it to her when she comes in. I ain't got sand enough to do it myself, but you don't mind, 'cause you ain't interested. I got to go to see the boss, anyway. You'll do it, won't you?"

"Yeh."

"A white carnation if she'll have me and a red one if she won't. Gee! I guess if she should slip me the red one I wouldn't ever want to see this place again."

He seized his hat and went out. Jo stood looking after him with mingled rage and despair in her heart, her little hands clenched so

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tightly that the finger-nails sank into the flesh and drew blood. Very pale, she crumpled up the letter, went to the vase, took a red carnation and placed it in a conspicuous position on the desk. Then she returned to her table and gazed with stony stare out of the window.

"Mr. Sears said: 'If you have a chance to get what you want without being caught, take it,' " she muttered. "He's right. I will."

At length a flush came into her bloodless cheeks, and she looked around guiltily, as though it were possible for anyone to have seen her. Hesitatingly she drew the crumpled missive from her pocket. Slowly she smoothed it out. Twice she started for the desk, and twice drew back.

"I can't! Oh, I can't!" she moaned.

Finally the fierce struggle within her was decided. Going to the desk she placed the let-

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ter under a weight and put the carnation back in the vase. Then, unable longer to restrain the flood pent up with such difficulty, she burst into tears and hurried from the room.

CHAPTER VII

Frequenters of the Golden Palace and others in the New Year's eve crowds bent on celebrating at the "restaurant of the pretty waitresses," as the place had come to be known, were amazed to find that on this of all nights it was closed. The electric signs shone resplendently and added to the gayety of La Salle Street, but shades which shut the interior completely from sight had been put up at the windows, and the door was locked.

Had its oldest customer been able to obtain admittance he would have failed to recognize the place. The dining tables had been removed. Red carpet covered the entire floor. Similar hued hangings and draperies masked the walls, and around the room and on the new electric

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fixtures which cast a brilliant light over the scene hung wreaths and garlands of holly and mistletoe. A balcony which overlooked the main dining-room and which had been reserved for the orchestra was banked heavily with palms.

Harold Sears, Jo, Lord Murray and Billy, the cook, who had been helping to effect this transformation, desisted from their labors and cast a critical eye around to see where further finishing touches were needed.

"Reminds me of Old England in the holidays, don't you know," observed Lord Murray. "It's perfectly ripping over there, then."

"Rather funny for a café to suspend business on New Year's eve just to give a party," remarked Harold.

"Yes, it's too bad to lose all the coin we'd take in here to-night if the restaurant was open," assented Jo. "But we had to give Elsie

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a kind of celebration, you know. Let's see, she's been on the stage just three months, hasn't she?"

"About that; but she's made the hit of the year."

"I hope she'll have a good time here to-night. If she don't it'll break Con's heart. Why he's been planning this blow-out in her honor for weeks. Cost quite a lot to fix the place up just for to-night, and I hope she'll appreciate it."

"Of course she will," declared Lord Murray confidently. "We'll all pitch in and make it a go, don't you know."

"Yes," pleaded the girl, "help Con all you can, because this society game is new to him and if he didn't pull it off all right before Elsie, he'd never get over it. Gee!" she added, addressing Sears, "him and Elsie would make an awful swell couple—don't you think so?"

Harold looked at her thoughtfully, filled with

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pity, knowing that her little heart was swollen big with anguish.

"I guess you and I don't need to say much about that, Jo," he answered so that only she could hear. "Brace up, girl, we're both in the same boat."

Con Ryan at this juncture made his appearance in a hired dress suit, the tight fit of which increased the discomfort which the mere fact of being attired in the "glad rags," as he called them, manifestly occasioned him.

"Don't stand around here loafin', Billy," he commanded. "It's eleven o'clock now, and the sky-rockets begin in a few minutes. Gee! ain't those decorations a knock-out! Did you pipe the palms up there? Got an idea I'm going to spring that'll knock you all a twister. I bet Elsie'll be tickled when she sees all this has been framed up for her."

"Yes, but you mustn't expect her to enthuse

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much," warned Harold. "People on the stage are entertained so much, you know."

"Yeh," agreed Con, a slightly worried look coming into his face and showing that the thought of this was by no means new to him.

"Is that a full dress suit?" queried Jo.

"I should say so," he answered her, "it's so full it's ripping in the back."

"You'd better get a black tie and let me fix it for you," she advised, looking him over deprecatingly. "If Elsie saw that rainbow she'd die."

Con became anxious.

"Say, wouldn't she care for it?" he said. "I thought it was a knock-out. I got it at an Elk's reunion."

Lord Murray wanted to know whether the suit was made to order.

"I don't think it was made to wear," declared Harold. "What makes it smell so funny?"

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"That's moth balls," Con explained. "The guy said that's the only way to keep from getting holes in the suit. I got about a pound. I have to take one every hour. Say, on the dead, Jo, is it a good fit?"

"You couldn't have a better fit if you were an epileptic," the girl assured him.

"I thought it was kind of tight at first, but the guy that sold it to me said, 'If I were you I wouldn't have it touched.' I'm just crazy to get one look at myself."

"You'd be crazy if you *did* get one look," commented Jo.

"By the way, Con," interrupted Sears, "I suppose you know how to dance?"

"Do I? Say, when it comes to performing in the ball room, I'm the pride of the Blacksmiths' Union."

"Where did you learn?"

"By correspondence."

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"I suppose there'll be some most extraordinary looking people here to-night," suggested Lord Murray.

"Will there! Sure!" answered Con. "There'll be a whole bunch of Montgomery Ward make-ups, I suppose, but they're all my pals and I'm going to stack 'em to a good time with punch and all the hay-fever torches they can smoke. All I hope is they don't get too much up their nose."

"I'm very curious to see some Americans of the working class," confided Lord Murray.

"I guess you won't know 'em when you see 'em," Con told him. "Why, say, if the American working man looked like the pictures of him on the editorial page, you'd have to have a union button to get into the Charity Ball."

"Well, anyway, this won't be as bad as running a country dance for a lot of farmers," put in Sears.

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"I don't know," replied Con warmly. "Let me put you next to something. The tall grass ain't got any corner on flat-heads. There's just as many Indians on Madison Street as there are at Peavie Junction."

"Say, what did your tailor make that suit for?" questioned the young man, changing the subject.

"I think he made it for spite," laughed Jo

"Aw, it ain't so bad," Con protested. "He said it would last as long as I wanted to wear it. I knew he was right as soon as I looked in the glass. Say, let's cut out the kiddin' and get busy for the big smoke, Jo. Do you know anything about handling a big party?"

"I waited on Mr. Taft once."

"Maybe we can suggest a few things," said Harold. "It might be a good plan to have Elsie bring some of the girls from the show with her after they get through and sing some songs to entertain the guests."

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"You're on, kid—that's immense," assented Con enthusiastically.

"Then you must have an announcer to tell everybody who the guests are when they arrive," said Lord Murray.

"You mean insult 'em right to their faces?"

"That's all right," declared Jo, "let Billy do it."

"And I'll be the reception committee and shake hands with everybody," volunteered Lord Murray.

"That's the cheese," acquiesced Con delightedly. "You'd be a knock-out as a head waiter. Hi, Billy, come here," he called as the black cook appeared at the door. "Did you put the stove out?"

"Not yet, suh! I'm gwine to frow it out to-morrow."

"How about the punch? Has it got a stick in it?"

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"I dunno, boss. I didn't notice what was in the bowl befo' I poured de punch in. Maybe it don't taste like nuffin, but it suttinly does look great. Anybody dat don't like dat punch must be color blind, yas sah!"

Jo, who was hanging up a bunch of mistletoe, turned to the cook.

"Listen, Billy," she said, "you're to stand at the door and announce all the guests."

"Yessum, I sho' nuff will denounce 'em, yas sah!"

"Gee!" exclaimed Con, going over to her. "I almost forgot about the mistletoe. You look great to-night, kid. Let's practise. Pretend we're both somebody else."

"All right—pretend I'm Elsie—"

"Who'll I be?"

"Oh, I don't care. You needn't pretend to be anybody, I guess."

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"Do you think she'll make me a good wife?" he demanded happily.

Jo laughed a little forced laugh.

"No, I think she'll make you a good husband," she replied, deftly eluding him as he sought to kiss her, and fleeing from the room.

He would have pursued her, but was headed off by a man who entered.

"Say, Con," said the newcomer, "I want to come to the blow-out, but I got to have a suit of soup and fish. Have you got anything you can lend me?"

"Sure, brother," replied that obliging gentleman. "I've been saving it for one of you guys, but be careful how you wear it. My father wore that suit when he was married. Go and ask Billy for it."

"Mistah William Jenkins, Mistah Walter Warburton, Mistah Harry Wright, Mistah

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Percy Johnson," yelled Billy at the door, as four men in evening dress made their appearance and confided their names to him.

"Glad to know you, really—glad to know you," said Lord Murray hurrying up and shaking hands with them effusively.

"Hang up your lids, you guys, and come into the game," invited Con. "I see you got on your fancy scenery. I'm wearing a percy outfit myself. How are your pipes? Are they in singing trim to-night?"

"Great—but so dry you could brush the dust off of 'em," said the first man to enter.

"That's all right—you'll find the dusters in that room over there. Pick out your own brand of poison and begin hoisting. I got something framed up here to-night I want you to help me with. Just about twelve o'clock I'm going to pull off a Chauncey Depew speil. At the

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wind-up I want you to chime in with a little joyous yodling—something to welcome the new year in, you know. Are you on?"

"Sure, Con, what do you want us to sing?"

"Do you all know 'Is Everybody Happy?' "

"Yep."

"That's the eye. I want to pull this off as a surprise. I'll be shootin' this hot air I was tellin' you about and toward the finish I'll say, 'Is Everybody Happy?' When I pull that it's your cue to come out there on the balcony and begin piping. Remember, I say, 'Is Everybody Happy?' an' you begin. If everything goes right with me an' the Queen of Sheba to-night, I expect to be feelin' pretty happy myself. That's why I picked out this song, see?"

"All right," said the spokesman. "Come on, boys, let's oil up."

When they were gone, Con turned anxiously to Billy.

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"Did you hear what I said?" he questioned.

"Yas, sah, boss."

"Well, them guys by that time won't be able to see through a ladder, or I don't know 'em. You keep your eyes on me, and when I say 'Is Everybody Happy?' you push 'em out. Then when they get through singing, I'll tip you the wink to turn on that 'Happy New Year to Elsie' sign hidden in the balcony. Catch on?"

"Yas, boss, you kin depend on me," said Billy earnestly. "I kin do anythin', boss. You leave it to me."

The man who had gone off to don the suit loaned by Con came in, followed by Jo, who was laughing at him. The suit was painfully tight and its wearer looked miserable.

"Gee! you look great," commented Con admiringly. "Honest, I wouldn't know you with it on. Turn around, pal. Ain't that swell on him?"

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"Ripping," admitted Lord Murray.

"I knew it would," said the man miserably.

"I feel kind of funny in it."

"My father wore that suit before the war."

"Yes," said Jo dryly, "that's what started the war."

"Of course, you know I'm awful glad to have you wear it," went on Con, ignoring the girl's remark, "but I'd hate to have anything happen to it; it was my father's. You can wear it just as long as you like, but for Heaven's sake, don't sit down in it. And don't spill anything on it. You better not eat anything while you got it on."

"Aw, give us a rest," grumbled the man. "Can I have a dance with you this evening, Miss Sargent?"

"Sure, two if you like," she answered promptly.

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"Gee! you ain't goin' to dance in that suit, are you?" demanded Con, alarmed. "I wouldn't care, but it was my old man's. You look great just standin' still. I wouldn't move if I was you. Just stand over in that corner all evening. Don't eat anything, don't drink, don't dance, and don't breathe much, an' you'll make the hit of your life."

By this time the guests, a fanciful and wonderful aggregation, were crowding into the room. Some, awkward in an atmosphere of such luxury and their unaccustomed evening dress, crossed it gingerly as though diffident about treading on the carpet. Others entered with an exaggerated swagger in an effort to appear at ease and as to the manner born. Among the women who fussed in were Tessie and Sybil.

"Are we late?" gushed the latter, mincing

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over to Con. "We rushed right over from the theatre as soon as the show ended. I ain't sure all the make-up's off yet."

"No, it ain't all off yet," he grinned.

"I'm so glad! I mean, how provoking! Tell me, Jo, dear, is my dress all right in the back?"

"Yes—in the back," said Jo.

"My gown is real mouse lean de sooeey, my dear."

"That's the same as chop suey—only it's French," commented Con.

"There's a stunnin' picture hat goes with this," went on Sybil, taking no notice of him.

"Yes?" said Jo. "What does it represent—Washington crossing his fingers?"

The music by this time had started up and the whole room was awhirl. Lord Murray, relieved of his duties as reception committee, went over to Jo, who had declined several would-be partners, and, sitting aloof in a cor-

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ner, was writing on a card. She did not feel like dancing.

"I say, cousin——" he began.

Jo interrupted him hastily.

"That's all right, that cousin thing, when we're alone, but don't ever let anyone else hear you do that," objected the girl.

"Really," he remonstrated, "I can't see why you don't admit publicly that you are a member of Lord Sargent's family and owner of an English fortune invested in the Grand Central Railroad."

"No, you don't understand," she said, following with her eyes Con, who was dancing. "I don't want him to know about it."

"You mean Mr. Con?"

"Yeh. I feel like it might queer me with him if he thought I was an heiress. We've always been such good pals. That's the only good thing that ever happened to me and I want

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to keep his friendship until after he marries Elsie. Then I won't care so much."

His lordship whistled, and stared at her through his eyeglass. He could find nothing to say.

"Would you mind doing me a favor?" asked the girl suddenly.

"It would afford me the keenest pleasure to do you a thousand favors," he answered earnestly.

She acknowledged his gallantry with a pitiful little smile and completed what she had begun to write. Then she put the card in a little box in which reposing on white wool was a bright twenty dollar gold piece mounted to wear on a watch chain. She tied the box with pink ribbon and handed it to Lord Murray.

"I want him to get this at midnight," she said. "I—I'm not feeling very well and may not be here."

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"You are feeling ill?" he said. "I'm awfully sorry, cousin. Is there anything I can do for you?"

She shook her head.

"Only what I have asked you to do. I'm real grateful to you. You're a good sort."

Con's gyrations with his partner were swinging him towards the corner. Jo moved off and Lord Murray became lost in the whirl of dancers. The girl went over towards the guests' door, and as she did so Mr. and Mrs. T. P. Q. Sears appeared on the threshold. The magnate looked at the unaccustomed scene with no approving eye.

"What's all this nonsense?" he demanded of Billy, whose mouth expanded from ear to ear in a grin of welcome as he recognized the newcomer.

"It's a New Year party," explained Jo, stepping forward.

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"Humph. I guess we're not invited. We've just been to the theatre and dropped in on our way home. Tell me, is that my fool son I see over there?"

"Mr. Harold is here."

"What do you know about that woman he's in love with now—Davis or something like that?" he queried.

"She's an actress."

"Really?" said Mrs. Sears.

"Well," replied Jo, qualifying her assertion, "some of the critics ain't positive about it yet."

"She's the one we saw at the theatre this evening," said Mrs. Sears to her husband. "You remember we couldn't see what she looked like because Mrs. Westville, who sat in the box just ahead of ours, wore such a large ostrich plume in her hat. I saw one just like it on Wabash Avenue, right there where the cars turn. I think it's simply horrid the way you

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never can get a seat coming down town in the morning. Of course, usually I come in the auto, but once in a while the chauffeur—well, as I was saying—What was it I started to tell you about?"

Sears, glaring towards his son, had not listened to her. She repeated the question.

"Are you talking again or yet?" he demanded savagely. "If my son should ever marry an actress, I'd disinherit him."

"What would you do with your money?" questioned Jo, while Mrs. Sears subsided.

"I'd chuck it in the lake before I'd let Harold spend it on an actress," he declared emphatically.

"Wouldn't you leave anything to charity?"

"Yes—my son."

"Aren't you a philanthropist?"

"I'm old enough to be one. The only difference between a grafter and a philanthropist is

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a matter of years. A man's a grafter until he's sixty and a philanthropist after that. Understand what I mean?"

"How well you are looking, Mrs. Sears," said Jo, anxious to relieve her embarrassment. "Marriage has made a lot of difference in you."

"You bet it has," growled Sears. "I used to get her for twelve dollars a week. Now she costs me twelve thousand. With all those clothes on she inventories about twenty thousand as she stands."

"I never saw a man who thought more of his wife than you do," commented Jo ironically and a little disgustedly.

"Harold did before I married her," he snapped.

Mrs. Sears, accustomed to her husband's fits of ill humor was too wise to show resentment at his treatment of her.

"He thinks twice as much of me as he did of

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his first wife," she said gushingly. "He bought her Louis Fifteen furniture but he got me Louis Thirty, that's fourteen more Louis than anyone else ever had. I do love French things—they're so rechurchy. I'm just learning Latin and chiropody. I think those foreign languages are fine."

"Did you know that this restaurant becomes my property after to-night?" inquired Sears, ignoring her and addressing Jo.

"No," admitted Jo, amazed.

"Yes, I bought the mortgage to-day and the constable will serve the writ of foreclosure this evening. Understand what I mean?"

"The girl gazed at him in consternation.

"That's tough on Con," she said. "It'll break him all up and spoil his party. Can't you wait until after the party is over, please?"

"Oh, it don't make any difference to me so long as I get the place," he retorted shrugging

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his shoulders. "I'm going to make an office out of it. Do you mind if I show my wife through?"

"No, not at all. Go as far as you like," she invited.

Jo forgot all about feeling ill and her intention to go away. Her little heart was filled with profound chagrin on Con's behalf. He was happy in the delusion that he would reopen the Golden Palace next morning as part proprietor, realizing in a measure his life ambition to own a restaurant of his own. Now, he was to be awakened rudely from his dream, at the moment when his cup of happiness was to be filled to overflowing by Elsie. Sears, coveting the place, and all powerful with his money, had by a sharp, quick deal acquired the property from the original owner and foreclosed the mortgage to oust the restaurant people, after having ascertained that they were not in a position to

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meet it or settle on arrears of interest; for the place had only begun to pay since Con Ryan had assumed charge and attracted custom by his quaint quips and cranks and his policy of engaging as waitresses the prettiest girls in Chicago that were available.

“Going to foreclose, is he?” soliloquized Jo, a resolute look coming into her eyes. “He won’t until after this party is over—not if I know anything about handling constables, and I ought to. I was brought up with ’em. They were always moving the furniture out of our home.”

Meanwhile Sears, his mind filled only with business and his plans for the building had neglected his wife, who was gazing at the dancers with interest from the ante-room when Lord Murray saw and joined her.

Billy’s stentorian voice raised in a bellow which dominated the music and the noise of the

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ball announced Miss Elsie Davis and the ladies from the Princess' Theatre.

Con, trembling with excitement and joy, burst through the crowd to greet her.

"Gee!" he exclaimed, half abashed in presence of the regally splendid creature the former cashier appeared to him to be, "you're lookin' immense to-night, Elsie. The blow-out couldn't start right till you came, and I hope you'll like it."

"Of course I shall," she responded graciously, glancing over the scene with inward surprise. "How pretty the place is. It all looks so different."

She, with the gratified Con, whose face beamed with pleasure and pride—as Jo, watching jealously, her heart breaking under its load of misery, could see—were swallowed up in the throng which gathered eagerly about the bevy of beauties from the theatre.

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"There's that actress!" sniffed Mrs. Sears. "I'd never have set foot in this place if I'd known she was to be here."

But Lord Murray, who could be deaf when he wanted to, piloted her deftly until they found themselves face to face with Elsie.

"Mrs. Sears," said Con, rising to the demands of his rôle as master of ceremonies, "let me knock you down to Elsie Davis, the girl that makes 'em all get up out of their seats and whistle. You ought to see her on the stage. She wears a dress that makes the Board of Trade sound like a deaf mutes' convention."

"I think I have seen Miss Davis somewhere," returned Mrs. Sears, coldly, without shaking hands. She had recognized the girl at once. "Maybe it was at the theatre."

"Yes—or maybe we met here," retorted Elsie. "One is obliged to meet so many people in a restaurant."

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"I didn't know so many ladies from the stage would be here," chimed in Lord Murray, scenting trouble, and anxious to avert it.

"Are there any *ladies* from the stage here?" demanded Mrs. Sears, imparting to the question a society drawl she had heard an actress à la mode use in impersonating a grande dame of a royal court, and which she concluded must be the habitual tone employed in conversation in aristocratic circles.

Con, who in turn realized that something was wrong, put in heartily:

"There ought to be a bunch of them here. I invited everybody."

"So I perceive," commented the irrepressible Mrs. Sears, looking squarely at Elsie.

Jo came to the actress' aid.

"Of course, Elsie, only a few of us were *forced* to come," she said. "Say, Con, this

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paint on the floor is beginning to get all scratched up. Look at it."

"Yes," observed Mrs. Sears, who decidedly was in aggressive mood and spoiling for trouble, "yes, paint doesn't look at all well in this light. Don't you find it so, Miss Davis?"

Before the latter could reply, Con, who, like Lord Murray, was becoming seriously worried, cut in with a diversion.

"Gee, there's some phoney looking gazelles here," he exclaimed. "There's one dame that don't look as if you could get her out of her dress unless you broke the glass and used the axe. That's her there, with that Indian that waltzes as if he had the cramp colic. She's his wife. He had to marry her on an election bet. Gee! that guy done lots of strong plugging for Bryan."

"Tell me," inquired Lord Murray of Elsie,

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backing up their host's effort, "is it hard for a chorus girl to get on?"

"No—a chorus girl is always on," laughed Elsie.

"Is there much money in being an actress?"

"Well, sometimes. I'm working for half my regular salary just now. The other half is a present."

But Mrs. Sears returned to the attack. "By the way, what color hair do you find most effective, from your experience, Miss Davis?" she asked.

Elsie this time got back at her.

"I think *yours* is perfectly beautiful, my dear," she said sweetly. "It looks so natural."

"It's very peculiar," observed Lord Murray determinedly, "I've noticed one little man there who seems to be familiar with all the ladies, but the men don't seem to care for him."

"You mean that little Clarence with the man-

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icured features?" said Con. "That's always the way. Any time you see a fresh young rabbit who has a high batting average with the Geraldine, you can gamble he's never much of a ten strike with the pokerplayers."

"The chorus girls seem to have won all the men," remarked Elsie.

"They always do," opined Mrs. Sears wickedly. "It's disgraceful. I can't see why. There ought to be some law to protect young men from chorus girls who don't care anything about them, but to get them drunk and spend their money—"

Con interrupted, and this time came squarely to the defense of the woman he loved.

"Oh, I don't know," he said in displeased tone, intended to shut Mrs. Sears off once for all. "It ain't just right to hand any Tobasco remarks to the merry-merrys. A lot of them chorus girls blow in here off and on and I've

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got 'em sized up as a pretty white bunch. If one of these Johnnies that is black with coin wants to blow it on a chorus girl, why shouldn't she let him? It's an even break on both sides. He wants to be entertained and he ought to be willin' to pay for it. He's got money to burn and the chorus girl likes the smell of smoke, that's all. Of course, there's a lot of battle-axes in the business, but when you figure that's the only way a chorus girl can have any fun, you can't blame 'em for trimmin' a lot of these mackarels, and lemme put you next to one thing—when you size 'em all up as bein' the kind you always read about in the magazine stories, you're dead wrong."

"Bravo! That's the style," approved Lord Murray with such emphasis that his companion took the hint that her remarks were appreciated by no one.

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"Thanks, Con, you're a gentleman," said Elsie, truly grateful.

Con was resolved that there should be no further opportunity for these exchanges of acrimony.

He signaled to the orchestra, and, raising his voice so that it rang through the big room, which at once became silent, cried:

"All ready for the grand march! Form in line! Take your partners! Everybody follow me and the big squeal!"

He turned to offer his arm to Elsie, but she was already clinging to that of Harold Sears, who, having rid himself of his previous partner, had hurried to her side.

"Thanks, Con, I have a partner," refused the girl.

Con was staggered, amazed. All eyes were upon them.

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"B—but," he stammered weakly, turning pale and then flushing scarlet, "this is the grand march—for you and me. It's *all* for you."

"I'm sorry, Con," said Elsie firmly. "I promised Mr. Sears that I would have no other partner to-night. I can't break my word."

He stood aghast, stunned, unable fully to comprehend it all, unable to move or to speak.

With quick wit Jo took in the situation and came bravely to the rescue and assumed direction of affairs.

"No, you're all mixed up, Con," she said loudly, so that everybody could hear, "Elsie's right. You don't understand these things. It would never do for the host to take the guest of honor away from another guest. She couldn't refuse Mr. Sears—it wouldn't be polite."

She added gayly to the orchestra as she took his arm:



HE STOOD AGHAST, STUNNED, UNABLE TO MOVE OR SPEAK.

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"Strike up the Grand March. Mr. Sears, you lead with Elsie. Con and I will follow."

The march began and they had paraded up and down and all round the room before Con recovered from the shock. He did not utter a word until the march was concluded and then when the couples had dispersed, he drew her into the ante-room and sent Billy away on some pretext.

When the negro's back was turned, Con took both of Jo's hands and, as shyly and wonderingly she raised her eyes to his, she saw that they were filled with tears.

"I got to hand it to you, old pal," he said brokenly, "you saved me from an awful bump and you made me see things I never saw before. I guess I've been an awful Indian not to tumble. You had to lie to get me out of that, but it was the whitest lie I ever saw pulled, and I ain't goin' to forget."

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His grasp on her hands tightened until she could have cried with the pain, as he added:

"There ain't no mistletoe where you are standin' but can I kiss you for that, kid?"

For answer, simply and without the slightest hesitation, she offered her lips, and he bent and kissed her.

Billy, prompt to execute the order, re-appeared, picking his way around the ball room. Jo pushed Con towards the ball room.

"Go on back to your guests. You'll be wanted in there, and you'll miss a dance," she said.

He obeyed her mechanically, but when he had taken a few steps, turned back.

"You'll come with me," he said. "Take my arm. We'll show the whole darned lot."

"No, not that. Nothing like that," she refused quickly. "Go in there! Go away!"

Again she pushed him, and this time he continued on out among the dancers.

CHAPTER VIII

Jo watched Con as he re-entered the ball room, tumultuous bliss in her soul. The whole course of the stars in her universe had been suddenly, miraculously, changed, and the world which half an hour before had been black as the nether darkness to her poor, hopeless eyes, now appeared transformed by a great glory light. She raised her hands still aching and tingling from the pressure of his convulsive clasp and kissed them.

A man opened the door behind her, and stood there hesitatingly as she turned.

"Come in," she said. "What do you want?"

"I'm a constable," he explained, "and I've come to serve a writ of foreclosure."

"Oh, you have. Well, wait just a moment."

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To Billy, who having circumnavigated the ball room, reached the ante-room at this juncture, she said:

"Go and ask Mr. Sears' college friends to come here."

In a minute three of them had joined her.

"You can't see Mr. Ryan now," said Jo to the unwelcome visitor. "He's busy."

The representative of the law expressed the determination to see him anyway, and intimated that he did not want to be kept waiting.

She drew the college men to one side and held a hurried consultation with them; then said to the constable:

"All right. Go with these gentlemen. They will put you right."

"Yes, come on," invited her fellow conspirators. "We'll treat you right."

He demurred, suspecting a trick, but they pounced upon him and hustled him away to-

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wards the barroom, where barkeepers and waiters were working at highest pressure. Billy went with them to lend a hand, if necessary, and Jo followed to watch the fun.

Lord Murray with Mrs. Sears on his arm, passing the ante-room as they strolled around the crowd engrossed in the terpsichorean delights of a two-step, noticed that it was empty and led his companion to a divan there, onto which she sank with a sigh of satisfaction.

"I had a most romantic experience in a place like this once," she observed. "I promised to marry three men the same night, thinking they were the same one."

"Most extraordinary!" he commented.

"Yes," she went on, "it was at a masquerade. I went with a man I was desperately in love with. He wore a blue domino. We were sitting in a quiet corner like this and he had just proposed to me when two other men with blue

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dominos came up at the same time. By the way, I'll tell you who one of them was. Do you remember that Mrs. Miller I pointed out to you the other day? Well, her husband was just getting off a car on State Street and there was an Italian organ-grinder right there having an argument with a woman who used to wash for us—Mrs. Murphy was her name. We always hired her because she did up shirt waists so well. Do you remember that one I had on yesterday? I'll tell you how I'm going to have it made. Hand embroidery over here, and—What was it I started to tell you about?"

"I don't know, and, by Jove, I don't care, so long as your husband doesn't come," avowed his lordship boldly, leaning over the back of the divan so near to her that his moustache almost brushed her face.

"You flirt too much for a husband," she laughed, moving a little away from him and

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turning so that she could see him, "but you'd be a dandy to be engaged to. Tell me the truth now. How many women in America have you made love to?"

"Don't know exactly. What's the population?"

"Did you ever make love to a married woman before?"

"Upon my soul, never before she was married."

"Do you talk the same way to all of them?"

"No, not every one. I haven't met them all yet. Won't you have some more punch? I helped make it myself."

He went to a table on which stood a bowl of the iced concoction, filled a glass for her, and squirted some seltzer into another glass for himself.

"You feel so much more sociable after a little drink, don't you know," he said as he handed

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it to her. "I'm drinking seltzer myself just now. This is the fifth I've had to-night."

The woman laughed.

"Aren't you afraid of getting drowned?" she inquired.

"No. Let me take your hand and we'll swim ashore together," he said.

She made no objection and he sat beside her, her hand in his.

"Deuced romantic," he murmured.

"Yes, through the seltzer," was her rejoinder.

"Why is your husband so jealous of you?"

"Look at him—then look at me. People say I married him for his money."

"Aw—did you?"

"Well, if I did I guess I earn all I get."

"Will you marry again when he dies?"

"Not the same day. It would be too hard on the minister."

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He dropped her hand hastily as the voices of Sears and Con Ryan were heard.

"Well, she was in here a minute ago," growled the husband. "I've got to find her."

"It's my husband. Con is trying to quiet him," said Mrs. Sears.

"Come here, into the conservatory," commanded Lord Murray.

He pushed the divan into a corner and screened the end on which she was seated by dragging a few big palms before it. Then he sat beside her, while she trembled with fright at the perilous position in which his manœuvre had placed her.

"What I want to know is, who is she with?" said the husband, as he and Con entered. The manager caught sight of a woman's dress through the palm leaves, and headed Sears away from the screen.

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"Let's see who else is missing," he said. "Skinny Jones is there, so's Kid Hennessy—there's Jake and the undertaker and—"

"I'll bet it's that Englishman."

"Here, have some punch," invited Con, "you'll feel better. By the way, have you got control of the Grand Central Railroad yet? When I seen you last you was lookin' for a block of stock."

"Yes—and that Englishman's got that too. I can't seem to connect with him. I want to know where he is now and where my wife is."

"Never worry because you don't know where your wife is. Wait till you find out where she is and then you may have something to worry about. Say, I'm kind of thinking of getting married myself. What were you making when you first got married?"

"I was making a darned fool of myself. I haven't stopped."

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"Do you think it's a good thing for a man to marry the second time?"

"No; but *he* is. A man shouldn't marry on less than \$100,000."

"Whew!" whistled Con. "I guess I'm an awful piker."

"Suppose you got \$100,000—where would you live?"

"Sing-Sing. Have some more punch. Say, you married your stenographer, didn't you?"

"Yes. She became so expert at signing my name that I had to marry her. But I wasn't cut out for a wife like that. She gets up at noon and doesn't begin to feel right till about four A.M."

"I'm onto the kind you mean. She ought to have married a cab driver, or a conductor on an owl car."

"I've got to find her. I think I'll put her in a cage. Understand what I mean?"

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He went out, fuming.

"Say," muttered Con, as he followed him, "if that guy was Adam in the Garden of Eden he'd be jealous of the snake."

"Gee! that was close!" exclaimed Mrs. Sears, greatly relieved.

"I like it that way, don't you know," declared her companion.

"Remember the old saying, 'Only the young die good,' " she laughed.

He put his arm around her and drew her unresisting to him.

"What are you thinking about?" she remonstrated feebly.

"How glad I am that Columbus discovered America," he said, as Sears re-entered, heard his voice and confronted them.

"Jessie, what does this mean?" demanded her husband, too astonished at his sudden discovery to manifest his rage at once.

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"We were discussing history," she explained, hastily straightening up and drawing away from Lord Murray.

"I demand an explanation of you," thundered Sears, addressing his lordship. "You have compromised my wife. Understand what I mean?"

The Englishman jumped to his feet.

"I'm a gentleman," he answered suavely, "and if I've compromised her I'll marry her. Here, you shall be the first to drink to the happy couple."

Sears, mad with rage, made for him just as Con entered the room. The manager leaped between them.

"Just in time to introduce you," he cried. "This is Lord Murray, who is over here from England—"

"Just doing the country," smiled his lordship.

"Yes — doin' the country," echoed Con.

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"Shake hands with Mr. Sears, he's in the same line of business."

Ryan's intervention had given Mrs. Sears time to recover her presence of mind. She began a fierce counter attack before her husband, choking with fury, could get in a word.

"This is a fine exhibition you are making of yourself," she cried scathingly, confronting him with great scorn. "What do you think I am? Do you imagine I am a baby that you can keep barred in a high chair? Everybody said I was crazy to marry an old fool like you, and you begin to make me think that everybody was right."

"Gee! this is where I vamp," said Con to himself, slipping discreetly away. "You got to handle a petticoat with gloves when she gets to spreadin' her wings like that."

Despite his habitual snubbing and bullying, Sears was easily cowed when his wife asserted



"EVERYBODY SAID I WAS CRAZY TO MARRY AN OLD FOOL LIKE YOU."

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herself fearlessly and met him with his own weapons.

"You acted as if you were crazy," he retorted.

She saw that her contemptuous attitude had weakened him and followed it up with an outburst of violent wrath.

"I could have married a dozen better men than you, and what's more, I'm going to do it. Your first wife must have been a terror, you're so suspicious. Maybe I ain't such a swell dame and all that. I may be a bottle blonde—I never said I wasn't—but I can trim any lady or gent that says I am, and there ain't anybody can make me go home from this party. There!"

T. P. Q. Sears, the great theatrical and railroad magnate, unbending tyrant in matters of business, was down and out.

"A husband should know what his wife does," he said mildly.

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"Yes, but not everything she does," corrected Mrs. Sears.

"I think you'd better excuse me," ventured Lord Murray, embarrassed, deeming that it would be advisable to leave the couple to fight it out unhampered by the presence of a witness.

Mrs. Sears put forth a restraining hand.

"Oh, no, you know we have the next dance together," she said.

"You must come, too, then, Mr. Sears," declared his lordship conciliatingly. "I have a perfectly ripping story to tell you. It starts, 'Why is the Fourth of July?'"

"No. I think it's time for us to go home."

"I don't want to go home," protested his wife. "You never want me to have any fun."

"When you know how jealous I am you ought to be more careful about letting me see you with other men."

"I'm just as careful about that as I can be,

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now. Come on, Lord Murray. Are you acquainted with the Krag-Andersons? They live out at Oconomoc. I wouldn't care to live out there, though. I do hate to ride on the cars, don't you? It musses up your dresses so. I spoiled a lovely crêpe de chine that way. It was the summer before the year Roosevelt was elected. I remember saying to Mr. Sears that I hoped he'd win because Alice Blue was so becoming to me. Do you think so? I wore that dress the first time at a reception given by Mrs. Wilson, the young actress that married that young McDonald—you know the family—the less said the better—that's what I always think. What was it I started to tell you about?"

"If Edison had only known about her he'd never have tried to spring the phoneygraph." commented Con, who returned in time to hear her.

Sears, who watched his wife go, not daring

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to raise any further objection, sighed wearily.

"When she starts talking you never can tell where she'll finish," he agreed.

Con, who had not had a minute to himself all the evening, and who reasoned that after all the fact that Elsie had led the grand march with Harold Sears probably had no particular significance, set out to look for her, determined to declare his suit and settle the matter once for all. He wanted to carry out his original plan of announcing their engagement at the moment of the grand flourish at midnight.

At that precise moment Harold Sears was declaring his own love to the former cashier in a secluded corner under the balcony where they were resting from their exertions.

"Elsie," he was saying, "I want to ask you to marry me. I haven't much to say about myself. I've been a little wild, I guess, but that's all over—has been ever since I met you. I want

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to tell you frankly that if I marry you the governor will disinherit me. I'm not offering you a palace or much in the way of luxuries. I've got to get out and make my own way, but I'm young and strong and with you to help me I know I can succeed just as well as my father did, though maybe in a different way."

Elsie bowed her head with affected shyness to hide the triumph that gleamed in her eyes. She had been leading up cleverly to this from the day she had made a fool of him in the restaurant. If he married her, she would play her game so as to become reconciled to Mrs. Sears and win over the father so as to ensure for herself and Harold an eventual share of his millions. If the young man were dissuaded from making her his wife there would be at the least a settlement of from \$25,000 to \$50,000 for breach of promise with the certainty of a handsome contract and a star rôle at the

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theatre, following the wide advertising the suit would bring. In either event she had everything to gain. However, she did not want to appear too eager.

"I've heard you were an awfully fast young man at college," she said, "and made love to many women."

"Not if I knew you were looking. And you—have you ever been engaged?"

"Once or twice—just for practice."

"How many rivals have I got?"

"I can count all my suitors on the fingers of one hand. Let's see, the first finger is for Mr. Hare, the manager of the theatre, the second finger is for 'Con'—dear old Con—and my third finger—let's see—who is that finger for? Oh, yes, my third finger is for you."

He drew a magnificent engagement ring from his pocket.

"You don't mind if I put this on that finger

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that belongs to me, do you?" he demanded, as he slipped it gently on.

"Oh! Harold!" she cooed.

"And you will be my wife?"

"Y—es."

Actuated by the same thought they gazed quickly around. The draped curtains hanging from each corner of the balcony partly hid them from view. She bent towards him and a long kiss sealed their mutual pledge.

CHAPTER IX

A little later Con discovered them, and Elsie promptly assumed a stage expression of innocence.

"I don't want to butt in," said Con, but you promised me a dance, Elsie, and this is the first chance I've had."

"Certainly, that's all right," said Harold cordially, getting up. "I'll take you again, Elsie, when you're through."

Con looked at him gratefully as he smiled his thanks.

"Do you want to dance this, or wouldn't you rather just talk?" asked Con in tones that implied that he himself wanted only to talk.

"I'd much rather talk," replied the girl to humor him, and knowing perfectly well what

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was coming. "We haven't had a good chat for ever so long."

"Say—" he began nervously as he seated himself in the place beside her that young Sears had just vacated. He could get no further with what he had intended to tell her.

"I'd rather hear you say it."

"Elsie," he blurted desperately, "I seen young Sears has been hangin' round an awful lot to-night, but I know you ain't the kind to play both ends against the centre. When a girl does that she usually gets a knot in her string. Do you get me?"

"No—I don't, Con. Why are you talking about Harold being with me?"

"Let's get down to the plot of the piece, Elsie. I've been doping this blow-out for weeks so I could let 'em all see that you was the big smoke with me. That's what I want you to be here all the time."

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"But I can't come back here and work, no matter how much I like you and Jo."

"Me and Jo!"

"Yes, of course—both of you, and Billy and all the girls. I've got to make good on the stage, unless something else happens. I shall be a great actress. Maybe some day you'll see me playing Lady Macbeth."

"I wouldn't care whether you played Lady Macbeth or little casino."

"Don't you want me to be a hit?"

"Yeh—but right here. You always was the hit of this place. Every guy that walked up to the cashier's desk thought it was a pleasure to hand you money. That's the way I always felt about it—that's why—"

"Harold's beckoning, it must be his dance," she interrupted.

"What do we care whose dance it is?" he said impatiently. "Elsie, I reckon you know you've

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always been the blue chip with me. I ain't got any first-class Boston language that ain't never been used yet an' I ain't wise to how a guy should grab a girl's lunch-book, an' break it to her like one of them Bertha M. Clay heroes, an' I can't tip it off to you how I put a crimp in Wall Street yesterday. I guess I'm glad I ain't that kind, because I notice that every guy that's wise to what J. Pierp. Morgan is goin' to do next, is rollin' his own cigarettes. You know I ain't black with the samoleons—I couldn't promise my girl a house that faces North, South, East or West—"

"Oh, you haven't told me how you're going to fix the café up," she interrupted again, this time hastily.

"How you and I are, you mean?" he said fondly putting out his arm to draw her to him.

She rose out of reach and gazed at him in affected surprise at the remark.

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"You and I?" she repeated.

"Why, wasn't that the way we framed it in the old days?"

"Oh, you mean I was going to make suggestions and help plan it? Yes—go on."

With a swift look she signalled to Harold, who was watching them, to fetch her.

"I guess maybe there's something else that ought to be settled first," said Con slowly.

"Something else? You mean putting in an addition, so you can have more tables? Oh, you'll excuse me, Con, won't you. Here's Mr. Sears coming for his dance."

Greatly disconcerted and cursing Harold in his heart, he relinquished her to him with the best grace he could command under the circumstances. As he stood there, anxious to be alone with his trouble, Jo came up.

"Has the ice cream arrived?" she queried.

"I think it has," he said ruefully.

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"What's the matter?"

"Nothin', kid. I guess maybe she didn't understand."

"No—she couldn't have," said Jo consolingly. "Cheer up, Con. She'll come around all right."

"Yeh—I guess I got to ask her right out, so she'll understand. Anyway I ain't goin' around throwin' up the sponge and lookin' like I was practicin' to be a pall-bearer. I've got something great up my sleeve. I'm goin' to pull it in a few minutes, just when the New Year's bells start ringin'. I bet that will win her. It'll be a knockout and she ought to fall for it great."

"Sure she will, Con. Don't feel sorry."

"Gee! you're a good pal for a guy when he's thinkin' about doin' the parachute," he said, gazing at her gratefully, and for the second time finding comfort and encouragement from

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her devotion. "You ain't got much team work about your clothes, but you're all right. And you sent me a New Year present, too," he added, remembering it and taking the box from his pocket. "Honest, Jo, you make me feel like a piker in a jack pot with one white chip, or a paper napkin at a rainy day picnic. You're always doin' somethin' nice for me."

"Don't open it yet," she recommended.

"No, I won't. I'll bet it's somethin' swell. I—"

He was interrupted by a terrific racket in the barroom, and rushed off, followed by Lord Murray and other men.

"You guys be quiet, or I'll hang a couple of you across the chandelier," he threatened.

The college men had done their duty by the constable so conscientiously that he was fighting drunk, but he was no match for their brawn and muscle, and when Con entered they had him

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helpless on the floor and were sitting on him in a row.

"Ain't it funny," grumbled Con, as he emerged into the ball room again, "that when a guy gets on a dress suit, that's his cue to begin hoisting till he gets so diked up he couldn't jump off the Masonic Temple and hit the ground."

"Why don't you call the bobby?" suggested Lord Murray.

"The what?" Con demanded, stopping short.

"The bobby."

"He means the policemen," explained Sears senior, who had also been attracted by the noise.

"Can you beat that?" said Con, looking around as if he expected an answer. "If I ever called Casey the cop by that name, he'd swing on me in the kisses and knock a few dominoes down my gurgle."

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The clock now marked two minutes of midnight, and Harold Sears, mounting a chair, signalled the orchestra to stop, and addressed the company who crowded round him.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, "I'd like your kind attention for a few minutes—"

"Hurrray!" cut in Lord Murray. "Somebody lend him a small revolver and a couple of gold watches."

"Ladies and gentlemen," began Harold again, loudly. "It is now about two minutes before the beginning of the New Year. Gather around and fill your glasses, for at twelve o'clock I want you to join with the New Year's bells in a toast to Miss Elsie Davis, formerly of this café, now the idol of the stage, who has consented to become my wife!"

"Damn!" roared the elder Sears, but the ejaculation was drowned in the storm of cheering and applause which greeted this announce-

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ment, and which was in progress when a din of whistles and bells and tin horns outside announced the birth of the new year. Con reeled away and sank into a chair in a corner, where, unnoticed, he sat with his head in his hands.

Four policemen in uniform entered and inquired for Jim Casey.

"Who's he?" demanded Jo, intercepting them.

"He's a constable," answered the roundsman in charge. "He was sent here three hours ago to foreclose a mortgage on this place and he ain't reported back for duty."

"Please wait a minute," said the girl, and she kept them on one side.

Billy, after a wild hunt, discovered Con.

"Is it time fo' de gran' surprise? Shall Ah do it now?" he asked.

"Yeh—pull anything you want to—I don't care," replied Con dejectedly.

"Ah guess only about one of 'em can sing,

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but Ah'll bring him out. Ah doan know 'bout 'at 'lectric lights—maybe it'll work," and the black cook shuffled off.

Harold, when a semblance of quietness had been restored, addressed the company once more.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I think Mr. Ryan has a little surprise in store for us."

"Hurrray!" shouted the guests.

"Please keep quiet and watch the balcony," he requested.

In another moment the electric greeting flashed out: "Happy New Year to Elsie."

The company again burst into a storm of applause, and before it had subsided Billy appeared struggling with the intoxicated and badly used up constable, whom the college men, too intoxicated themselves to be further interested in, had left propped up in a corner,

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mumbling his writ to himself. Billy, seeing the paper in the man's hand and being unable to find any trace of the singers, had jumped to the conclusion that he must be one of them, and, determined to make the best of the situation, had yanked him onto the balcony and ordered him to sing on pain of having his "block knocked off," among other dire consequences.

In a loud, if thick voice, the man announced that the mortgage had been foreclosed, and read the dispossess writ. At the same time the policemen—having by this act been apprised of his whereabouts, appeared on the balcony.

The sight of the uniformed men started a stampede of the guests, who, unable to understand the situation, were under the impression that the place was being raided.

In a few minutes the ball room had been emptied.

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Half an hour later, Con, having been made acquainted with the state of affairs by the policemen and accepted service of the dispossess papers, sat alone in the deserted and darkened ball room, sobbing aloud in his misery. His hand thrust mechanically in his coat pocket encountered the box containing Jo's present. He opened it, drew forth the paper and read:

"May you always be as happy as you are to-night. Please accept this from your old pal,

"JOSEPHINE."

CHAPTER X

Little less busy than the Golden Palace Restaurant had been under the management of Con Ryan were the offices of the Western Theatrical Association, T. P. Q. Sears, president, into which the building had been transformed. Con, with many a sigh, had witnessed the workmen demolishing this palace where he had hoped to accomplish his ambition and rule supreme, with Elsie as his wife and queen enthroned once more at the cashier's desk and attracting custom as of old. His air castles rudely shattered, he had abandoned the restaurant business as being fraught with constant reminders, every one of which would be a fresh wound to his lacerated heart and pride, and had procured employment at the precarious occupation of a book canvasser on commission.

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Two other figures that had been familiar at the Golden Palace had entered upon new functions in the offices of Mr. Sears. They were Josephine Sargent and Billy the cook. Having sized up the girl as being possessed of precisely those qualities of self-possession, assurance, common sense and discretion, which combine to make an ideal confidential secretary, and being, moreover, influenced by her attractive personality, the great man had made an offer for her services that had they known of it would have caused every other lady typewriter and office factotum in La Salle Street to turn green with envy and become incontinently dissatisfied with her own salary.

Jo, having quickly accustomed her mind and fingers to the writing machine, sat at a desk in the outer office and varied her typewriting performances by answering telephone calls and preserving her employer from the army of ap-

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plicants for work and would-be interviewers on every conceivable subject who thronged the offices from 9 A.M. to 5 P.M. Brisk of manner, neat and trim in her shirt-waist and black dress, quick to judge the importance or otherwise of callers, and to settle at once questions that did not call for decision by Mr. Sears, she was the highest personification of that wonderful product of our times, the American woman of business. She had come into a part of the fortune Lord Murray had so generously brought her, and which he had advanced out of his own ample means pending the settlement of the legal formalities which were taking longer than he had bargained for, so that it was not from necessity of earning a living that she buckled down daily to her really hard and fatiguing work. But she had a fixed purpose in pursuing the course she had adopted. Moreover, with the comforting knowledge that her future

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was assured, that she was then and for all time independent of the world, which is so merciless to those dependent upon it, she enjoyed hugely her experience as an office employee. It was so different from the position of waitress in which she previously had earned her living. The purpose to which she clung thus steadfastly was associated with the welfare of Con Ryan, who was the one being on earth for whom she cared. Con, however, knew no more about this than did anyone else. And aside from Lord Murray and the lawyers concerned not a living soul was aware of the windfall that had come to her. Lord Murray was utterly unable to comprehend her attitude, and could only put it down to a puzzling exhibition of American eccentricity; but he respected loyally her wish that the matter of her fortune should remain a secret.

Con, in his grief and humiliation had re-

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frained from seeing her since the double catastrophe that had overwhelmed him at the birth of the year. For nine months he had avoided all those with whom he once was on such cordial terms. But Jo was frequently uppermost in his thoughts. He remembered with tenderness the constant solicitude his boyhood sweetheart had manifested for him, how devotedly she had stood by him in his trouble. The more he thought of her, the more did he realize what his insensate infatuation for Elsie Davis had caused him to miss in the little waitress. Now that he had been radically cured of his passion he was able to understand the folly of it, and that Elsie would not have made for him the kind of a wife he needed.

A longing to see Jo again took possession of him. Winter and summer had gone and the late fall season had arrived. Several times he had passed the offices of the Western Theatrical

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Association, where he had learned she was employed, without being able to summon up courage and enter. He was at a loss for a pretext; moreover he hated Sears with a bitter hatred for his action in seizing the place and ousting him without warning or the slightest compunction when the chance for which he had worked so hard and waited so long finally had come to him. He now reasoned that this resentment pushed to the length of injuring himself, and of which the object of it was utterly oblivious, was foolish. It occurred to him that an attempt to sell some books to the capitalist would be a good excuse for entering the place, and the resolution to do so engendered a vague hope that if he saw him Sears might somehow in some way help him to a better job. Book canvassing was not exactly a congenial occupation to the unlettered Con, and though, owing to his natural aplomb, contagious good humor and

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gift of the gab, he would have made a success as a commercial traveler in almost any other line, he had failed lamentably in that he had elected to follow, with the result that he was as he expressed it to himself, "on his uppers." Perhaps any chance of success at it had been rendered impossible by the fact that his misfortune and crushing disappointment had made him listless and choked the well spring of his humor, which only now was starting up again with spasmodic bubblings.

Jo, seated at her desk, had, with a glib pretext, refused over the telephone a request for theatre tickets, made as soon as the office had opened, when Billy approached her. It was evident from his eagerness that he was the bearer of important tidings.

"'E paper 'is mawnin' says 'at Miss Elsie an' young Harold Sears done got married," he said. "Mah goodness!"

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"Yeh—they were married yesterday. I suppose Mr. Sears saw it, because it's in all the papers. He'll be all up in the air when he comes in, so look out."

"Yessum. Ah seen Mistah Con yes'day. Ah reckon he's up agin it pretty hard 'ese days."

"Ah, you did?"

"Yessum, Miss Sargent," went on Billy seeing she was interested. "Ah seen him eatin' down in 'e basement lunch counter where you get rolls an' coffee fer fi' cents."

Jo, who had taken down the receiver to call up a telephone number, put it back with a violence that nearly broke it.

"Honest, Billy?" she demanded, deep commiseration in her eyes.

"Sho' 'nough. 'At's where Ah eat mah-self when 'em policy numbers don't use me right. He sho' looked shabby, too."

"You don't say?"

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"Yessum."

Jo's heart swelled with pity and she lapsed into a reverie of great seriousness, seeing which, and that she had no inclination to talk further, Billy went away. Her cogitations were interrupted by the arrival of Tessie and Sybil.

"Is Mr. Sears in?" inquired the former.

"No," replied Jo.

"Well, we'll wait a few minutes," said Sybil. "We're in vaudeville now, so we came down to see Mr. Sears. How much time do you think we could get?"

"The judge will decide that after the jury is in."

Jo had hardly delivered herself of this witicism when Mr. Sears entered hurriedly, threw his hat to Billy, brushed by the people waiting in the outer office and went into his sanctum, where Jo followed him.

"Any telegrams?" he demanded.

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"No, sir," said the girl.

"These letters all ready to sign?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'm not in to anybody. Understand what I mean?"

"Yes, sir. A gentleman is waiting to see you. Here is his card. He would not say what he wanted. Then there is a Mr. Smith. He says he is an author and wants to show you a play."

"What does the man who wouldn't tell his business look like?"

"Distinguished."

"Well, I suppose I'd better see 'em."

The first visitor was duly ushered into the magnate's presence. In a moment he came out with a disconcerted air and the telephone bell on Jo's desk rang violently.

"Tell that black loafer if he lets in any more book agents I'll fire him. Understand?" came Sears' angry voice when she responded.

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"Yes, sir," she said. "There's a man here says he wants to see you about half an hour."

"Tell him the subject doesn't interest me."

"He says he wants to show you how to make a lot of money."

"Nobody can show me anything about how to make money."

"He says he can wait."

"Tell him not to, and send that author in. And, by the by, I'm expecting Lord Murray with that block of Grand Central stock. Has he been in?"

"No, sir, not to-day."

"I've got to get that before this evening. Call up his hotel and see if you can reach him in any way. Understand what I mean?"

"Yes sir," answered Jo with a quiet smile.

The playwright entered the inner office timidly.

"Sit down," invited Sears without looking up

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from the letter he was about to sign. "What have you got?"

"A play."

"Is it funny?"

"My friends say it's funnier than 'Charlie's Aunt.' "

"Then make me laugh."

"It's called 'The Isle of Bungaloo,' a musical comedy in two acts."

The author read on till the president of the Western Theatrical Association stopped him.

"Read me one of the jokes," he requested.

"The best one I have is 'Why is the Fourth of July?' "

"That will do," said Sears hurriedly. "Leave your book here and drop in some time next year and we'll let you know about it then."

Meanwhile Tessie had approached Billy. The latter was ordering about with lordly import-

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ance callers who made known that their mission was to procure employment.

"You're pretty much the whole thing around here, aren't you, now?" said the girl.

"Yes—me an' Mr. Sears. I lets the people in and Mistah Sears he lets 'em out."

"Will you get Mr. Sears to see us?"

"Yo' want me to use mah pusson'l influence wif Mistah Sears! Ah don't reckon Ah could do it. You see we all is mighty good frends—Mistah Sears an' me an'—" (Tessie slipped a dollar into his hand) "but I reckon 'at for you' Ah might use all 'e influence 'ith him Ah got."

"You're next," called Jo to the girls.

Tessie, as she went in with Sybil, cast a savage look at Billy.

"What do you want?" demanded Sears with scant politeness.

"We want to go into vaudeville—a sister act.

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We both sing beautiful. We was an awful hit at Proctor's Fifth Avenue last month, but the old stage manager didn't know nothin' about art and put us in the super show. If it hadn't been for that we'd be booked solid till next June. We girls is so unfortunate. That's what it is to be a lady even though you has to work. Can't we get you to help us out?"

"No, that's what I keep a porter for."

"A refined knock-about act?"

"Yes, all the managers knocked about it."

He pressed a button and Jo entered.

"Take the names and addresses of these ladies," he ordered. "I don't know what they want. Tell them to write down what they said and mail it to me and I'll read it. Haven't time to listen."

When Jo emerged she found Con standing in the outer office reeling off mechanically a cut-and-dried argument.

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"I suppose," he was saying, "you have heard of the failure of Henderson, Adams & Co., which enabled our firm to offer these splendid volumes of the favorite poets, half morocco and the other half—I don't know what the other half is—the other half-tones, I guess. Each volume is guaranteed to weigh six pounds an'—"

He broke short off and his face brightened with a glad smile as he saw Jo.

"Hello, Kid!" he said. "You're lookin' fine. How's business?"

"Mine's great, how's yours?" she replied, looking him over while her heart thumped violently.

"A knock-out," he said with affected carelessness, and a gleam of his old-time geniality. "Do me a favor, kid. Slip one of these favorite poets to the boss and see if he'd care for it."

Without a word the girl took the book, en-

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tered Sears' office, picked up the letters he had signed, and came out again.

"He says he'll take one," she lied. "How much is it?"

"No, did he though?" he said with joyful surprise. "Well, it's a dollar fifty—that's twenty-five cents a pound."

She took the money from her purse and handed it to him.

"Gee!" he said, forgetting himself. "That's the first one in three weeks."

There was no answering smile of cheerfulness on her face, and she remarked gravely:

"I thought you said business was good?"

"Well," said Con, weakly, with a sickly smile and a gulp in his throat, "maybe mine ain't but the papers say it's great out on La Salle Street. What's the matter," he added, trying to divert attention from himself. "The type-writer looks like it's broke."

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"Yes—I'm always broke."

"Is it hard to fix a typewriter?"

"Costs ten to fix me when I hear something. Did you see in the papers this morning about Elsie's marriage to Harold?"

"Yeh—I suppose His Nobs had the rabies," and he pointed with his thumb in the direction of the inner office.

"Con," she said lowering her voice.

"Yes, kid?" he interrogated.

"Do you still care for her?"

"No—not that way," he answered sheepishly, fidgeting from foot to foot. "Ain't it funny I used to think I wanted to marry her? I 'spose you can't account for a guy not knowing what he wants. I wasn't really in love with her."

"Yes you were."

"Well, I wasn't in the way I've been since

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with somebody else. Say, I heard a funny crack to-day."

"Never mind that. Tell me on the square, are you getting along all right?"

He averted his gaze, which she sought to catch, and became deeply interested in a calendar on the opposite wall as he replied evasively:

"Sure—I guess there ain't nothin' in the book business, but I got a lot of ideas that are knock-outs."

"Got any money?"

The question thus bluntly put made him still more uncomfortable.

"Sure," he said, still trying to head her off.

"Listen."

He rattled his pocket.

"Take out the money I just gave you."

He obeyed her as in the old days when they



HE PRODUCED A KNIFE, A BUNCH OF KEYS AND THE TWENTY
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were children and she bossed him; then he rattled his pocket again, triumphantly.

"Let's see," she commanded.

"Oh, that's all right," he said. "Don't you mind about me. I've got money."

"If you don't show I'll never speak to you again," she threatened.

He looked at her hesitatingly. There was earnest resolve in her face.

"Out with it!" she ordered.

He produced a knife, a bunch of keys and the twenty dollar gold piece she had mounted for his watch chain as the New Year gift.

"You've kept that twenty-dollar gold piece I gave you that night," she said, touched almost to tears.

"Yeh—I've been awfully close to the limit sometimes, but I ain't spent that yet. I've been floatin' around with the boys on the corners

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that ain't strong on nothin' but base-ball scores an' the chorus of 'Waltz Me Around Again Willie.' They got my watch and most everything else but that. Are you kind of glad I didn't spend it, kid?"

"Am I!"

A whole world of delight, of tenderness, of emotion was in the tone of the exclamation and in the look she gave him.

Her manner changed instantly as she suddenly realized that the waiting men and women were watching them, and as at the same moment Harold Sears and Elsie Davis entered the office.

"Gee!" she said, "here's Harold and Elsie. Now there'll be something doing. Come around and fetch me to-night. I want to talk to you. We quit at five o'clock."

"Sure, I'll be back at that time, sharp."

As he passed out Elsie greeted him.

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"Why, hello, Con," she said. "I'm awfully glad to see you."

"Hello, Elsie," he answered with a cheerful smile, as he went on without stopping.

"I guess I've changed a lot," he muttered, as he reached the street. "Yeh—I guess I've changed a lot. She looks pretty flossy all right and that's all I used to think about. She's a swell looking dame to take to the theatre, but not for me to marry."

The elder Sears, apprised of the arrival of his son with his bride, instructed Jo mildly to show them in. To the girl's surprise a smile flickered over his face. It had died out, however, and he looked stern as Harold and Elsie, terribly embarrassed, walked in.

"Well, what do you want?" was the old man's blunt greeting.

"I—I suppose you know we're married?" ventured Harold, falteringly.

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"Yes," he admitted. "I read all about it in the papers this morning." He added sarcastically, turning to Elsie: "I suppose I'm glad to see you. Anyway, it was a rather clever piece of work on your part, young woman, and if Harold was worth a damn I'd congratulate you. Understand what I mean?"

"Thank you—you're just as flattering as you are polite," she retorted coldly.

"But there's no use misunderstanding each other. You ought to know that since he has married against my wishes my son doesn't receive a cent of my money."

"Dad, you don't mean that," remonstrated Harold.

"Don't I? Wait and see!" was the grim rejoinder.

"What do we care, Harold?" chimed in Elsie. "It would have been nice to have some—but when you consider how he made it—"

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"How I made it?" snapped Sears. "What's the difference—just so I did?"

Elsie burst into a silvery laugh.

"I wanted to see how easily I could make you lose your temper. You were trying to be sarcastic before and you were rather proud of the way you were doing it, so I just thought I'd show you how easily I could make you drop it."

The magnate was astounded. He gazed at her handsome face, wreathed in smiles, and into the big violet eyes that met his fearlessly.

"You've got so much nerve you might be interesting," he commented finally. "Sit down."

"Governor, you were telling me the other day I was a fine specimen of American manhood," said his son earnestly. "I've been thinking about that—maybe I used to get drunk a lot and helped increase the revenues of owl cars, but I'm on the water wagon now—lashed to the tank. Have you ever done anything to benefit

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your country? All you do is to grab all the money you can—buy up Senators and contribute to a campaign fund for buying red fire to convince the common people your candidate is the better man because he has the biggest bonfire. You needn't talk about me. What would Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Jefferson have said about patriots like you?"

T. P. Q. Sears listened to this fine burst of righteous eloquence without manifesting the least perturbation or indignation.

"You," he retorted, pointing an accusing finger at him, "you've been to see George Cohan again!"

But Harold, all worked up and regardless of consequences, hurled this challenge at his parent:

"What have you ever done to uplift the common people?"

"I married my stenographer. I saved the first

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dollar I ever earned and I've got it yet. But what good does it do me to have a son like you—to know that after I die my son will be the biggest scoundrel in Chicago?"

"Yes—*when you die*," flashed Elsie.

"You ought to be proud of what *you've* got," sneered the old man. "He hasn't a cent and he doesn't know anything."

"Why, he's been through college."

"I said he didn't know anything. Anyway, he ought to know how to treat a wife."

"You mean because he's treated so many? I know all about Harold, Mr. Sears, you can't tell me anything new. I know how wild he was at college, but I love him, and he's going to be a man, even if all he owns now does amount only to some clothes, a few hat boxes, some golf clubs and a trunk full of medals."

"Yes—he can do a hundred yards in ten seconds. That will be useful in a flat. Can you

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support him in the style to which he has been accustomed? He usually requires an allowance of fifty thousand a year outside of bills for plate glass windows that he breaks. Then he's always falling in love with some fool woman, as he did with you. When he does, you can pass all this good advice on to the next one."

"Governor," exclaimed Harold jumping up indignantly, "we won't stay here to be insulted. Come on, Elsie."

"Just a moment," said his bride. "I hate to leave when your father has his sarcastic manner on. He really does it so well. I simply want to assure you, Mr. Sears, that my salary on the stage will keep us very comfortably until Harold gets started in business, so don't worry on his account. Meanwhile, I want to thank you for a very instructive morning. I've always wanted to see a man like you at close range."

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You're really amusing. Good-bye. We've had a very pleasant time—do come and see us, won't you?"

She moved towards the door, followed by Harold, but the old man jumped from his chair and grabbed them.

"Come here," he commanded. "Anybody that can stand the gaff as well as you have has simply got to be in my family. I never met a woman like you. You can handle Harold better than I can. If you had stood for what I said just to get my money, you'd never have seen a cent of it. Understand what I mean?"

He took her in his arms and kissed her. Then he shook hands heartily with his son.

"Now, children," he beamed, "you must leave me. I'm awfully busy. Go out and buy up the whole town, except what I own, and leave the bill to me. And come around to-night and square it with your—er—mother." And

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he winked at Harold, as the young man, treading on air, went out with his equally happy bride.

Old Sears sat smiling, lost in thought, for fully five minutes after they had gone. Then as mechanically he took up the ticker tape and glanced at the figures on it as it glided between his fingers, he brought his mind back to business.

"That Grand Central is going sky-high," he growled, looking worried and pacing the room with the tape in his hand. "If I don't get that block of stock by to-morrow, the bears will close in and the bubble will bust. If I could get some way of forcing that Englishman—"

He called Jo on the telephone.

"Haven't we heard from Lord Murray yet?" he asked.

"He wasn't in when we called up," replied the girl who had been talking to the English-

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man seated at that moment beside her desk.

"The transfer of stock has been fixed up," said Lord Murray, resuming their conversation when she had hung up the receiver. "Here's the deed all executed. I wish you all the luck and happiness in the world, cousin."

And he shook hands with her in his hearty way.

"I never can thank you the way I want to," replied the girl. "Are you going to stay in this country?"

"No—I don't think it suits me quite as well as the old place. I love everything about the little Isle—the routine ways of doing things—the theatres in the Strand—the—yes, even the blessed fog. I'm going back to the land where there's only one King—God save him!"

"One may be all right in England," laughed Jo, "but you've got to have three or better over here. Good-bye."

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"Mind," he said, "if you ever take it into your head to come home, if only for a visit, let me know so that I can meet you."

The buzzer summoning her to Sears' office began to hum even as she started to go there.

"Damn it, I've got to have that stock. I must swing this deal," he said. "Call an automobile. I must find Murray if I have to hunt over all Chicago."

"He was here a moment ago," she observed.

He looked at her in furious amazement.

"And you didn't let me know?" he gasped, almost suffocating. "Where is he? Get him at once. What's the matter with you, anyhow?"

"Nothing," she replied coolly. "There was no occasion for you to see him. He came to see me. I have the stock."

"What, that Grand Central? You? What do you mean?"

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"It was my inheritance from my father's family in England. I'll tell you about it some time. But do you want to buy it?"

"You're stark crazy," he declared. "You couldn't inherit it. Prove it."

She handed him a bundle of legal papers with the stock transfer certificate. He perused them carefully.

"It's true," he said, looking up at her. "Well, I'll be —"

"No occasion," she broke in. "Do you want to buy the stock?"

"This minute."

"I'll let it go at the market rate, but there's a condition attached. You've got to agree to move out of these offices—turn them back into a restaurant and lease it rent free for three years to Mr. Con Ryan."

He hesitated.

"This stock's been jumping all day," re-

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marked the girl carelessly. "It'll be worth twenty years' rent of this place more before the market closes."

He frowned and gazed at her quizzically for a moment.

"All right," he said, making up his mind. "It's a deal. I'll give you a formal receipt for the stock, and you can change at your leisure the contract I had drawn up for that Englishman, by inserting a clause covering this agreement and substituting your name for his. I haven't time to bother about it now. Turn on the phonograph."

She did so and he dictated into it the following:

"It is further agreed and covenanted that in consideration of the said transfer of one thousand shares of Grand Central preferred, the party of the first part shall fully equip said property as a restaurant the same to be

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leased, rent free for three years, to Mr. Con Ryan."

Without another word he darted out, growling as he signalled to a passing motor cab:

"Of course I'm going to lose that girl now she's got all that money, confound it. I'll never find her like in all Chicago, or any other place for that matter. If I'd married her instead of Jessie—"

The office was deserted when Con, a little late in keeping his appointment, entered. He was down in the mouth, for he had walked his legs off, and used every persuasive argument backed up by a revival of his old-time humor, in an effort to make a little money so that he could take Jo out to supper in style. She was busy in Mr. Sears' private office. He could see her silhouette through the glass door, so he waited by her desk.

"Gee! ain't made a sale to-day except the

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one she staked me to," he soliloquized sadly. "Well, it ain't no use beefin' over spilt milk. There's thousands of cows making new milk every day. Pipe the phoneygraph," he added noticing the instrument on her open desk. "Wonder what it plays?"

There being no one save Jo in the place he set the machine going. It repeated the clause Sears had dictated.

"What's this, Jo?" he inquired, as the girl at the noise came out of the inner office. "Have I been smokin', or what was that all about?"

"Just what you heard, Con Ryan," she said.

"You always were good at framin' up jokes," he grinned.

"This is no joke, it's on the dead level. Look."

She handed him the receipt for stock which Sears had scribbled, and then explained why he had dictated the clause. To further con-

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vince him she showed him the contract that had been drawn up in preparation for the Englishman's visit.

"And we're goin' to get this place back again as a beanery because you helped him get this stock?" he said, not understanding that the securities belonged to her.

"Yes."

Con waltzed about in his glee.

"Can you imagine how it'll be?" he said, stopping in front of the happy girl. "I'll brace up to 'em at the door like this. 'Good evening, Mr. Hennessy—right over this way. This table by the window. Here's a paper. Yeh—Murphy is doing some great work with the stick for the Sox. Say, do you see that guy over there, that's the Governor of Illinois. Yeh—that's him. He eats here.' Then you'll come waltzin' in with about a ton of glass and crockery— No, you won't. It's funny I was dreamin' all the time

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that you'd be there, too. Of course you wouldn't be coming back to be a waitress. You'll keep your job here. I ain't so sure I want the old place. And, anyhow, why did you do this for me?"

"Ain't it natural? Ain't you the only pal I ever had?"

"I dunno. It's a cinch you're the only real one I ever had—the pal that's stood by me. It's funny—I've been figurin' about you in all my plans lately. It was sort of you I was plannin' for."

She placed both hands on his shoulders.

"Was it, Con—honest?" she demanded, gazing into his eyes.

"I know what you mean—you mean her, Elsie. I was sort of dippy over her at one time. I guess I wanted to cop her out because I seen every other guy tryin' to do the same thing. I didn't have as good judgment then as I've

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got now. When I look back I see things a whole lot clearer. Remember how you used to keep Elsie from hurtin' my feelings—not that she'd intend to, you know, but just by not understanding me like you did—and how you used to help me try to make good with her, and how I used to come to you when I wasn't sure what to do? I thought I couldn't do without Elsie—but now I know that it was you I was dependin' on all the time. If I start in now—and I sure will get someone to back me with money to carry on when the place is fixed for business—maybe in a couple of years I'll have somethin'—and—and—Gee! if I had the nerve, I'd offer it all to you.”

“Try it,” she said, her eyes lighting up with the joy of her love requited at last.

“Jo,” he murmured huskily, “can you wait?”

“That's my job,” she answered, as he folded her in his arms.

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She nestled there, receiving his caresses with ecstasy, her love-hungry soul feasting upon the joy of the knowledge that he was hers for ever, rejoicing in the unsuspected wealth with which she would astonish him later, and which was all for him.

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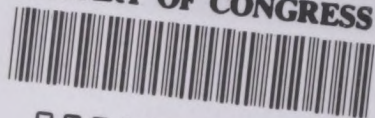
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